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CASSOCK AND COMEDY

ATHOL FORBES

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CASSOCK AND COMEDY

THE HUMOROUS SIDE OF CLERICAL LIFE

BY

ATHOL FORBES

AUTHOR OF
'A STRANGE DECEIT,' 'FOR LOVE OF A LADY,' ETC., ETC.

LONDON

SKEFFINGTON & SON, PICCADILLY

Publishers to H.M. The Queen and to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales

1898

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

Dedicated to

MY FRIENDS

CLERICAL AND LAY

IN THE NORTH COUNTRY

PREFACE

THERE is one weakness in this book — a serious drawback in this age of fiction's supreme reign — the sketches are true, and the characters are real. Here I apologise to the public. To tell the plain unvarnished truth is unworthy of an author, and is even considered as an affront to the public generally. But I do not pretend to be an author. True, I wear a fur-lined coat at times, but I have my hair cut regularly to the $\frac{1}{8}$-inch scale, and if you require further proof, you have only to read the chapters that follow.

I would also have you notice another point. This book does not claim to be intellectual. There are too many clever people now; we suffer from an epidemic of genius. It is not written to found a new religion, to elevate the masses, or purify society. It does not even claim to be philosophical. This I feel will be a point in my favour, but I mention it so that no one will put the book conspicuously in the forefront of the drawing-room on 'at home' days by the side of 'An Enquiry into the Origin of Evil,' 'Bubastes Unveiled,' or 'A Treatise on Andalusian Summers.' All mysteries have been carefully excluded, and Mahatmas have been warned off.

The scene of these articles is a well-known town

in the north of England, and for the greater part they are my own personal experiences of work in a large poor parish where I served my first curacy, and from which I took my title. Tempora mutantur et in illis nos mutamur; and my sphere of work now is what may be termed a more comfortable one. Yet at times I find myself looking back with tender regret to those early days when, with the freshness of my ordination upon me, I believed myself capable of reforming the whole parish—vicar included—in the short space of my diaconate. All my ideals were not realised; in fact, very, very few, yet so important was I at first (in my own estimation) that I sometimes used to seriously wonder what would happen if I left or died. But I did leave, and the world still placidly revolved on its axis. The good work goes on. Self-sacrificing men and women fill up the gaps, and bravely continue the battle between good and evil.

I have often heard people wonder how it is that men and women of culture and education can work and continue to labour in these horrible slums. Perhaps after reading this, if they will persevere to the end, they will have received an answer. Among many it is the fashion to smile and sneer at the pale-faced curate—pale-faced often because of the hardships under which he exists—but if it were not for such as he and his faithful lay helpers, who, strong in their belief in another and better world, and in One in whose sight we are of more account than sparrows, help the down-trodden to struggle on bravely through the night, the eyes of those who smile and sneer might be rudely opened.

Preface

There is no romance in this book. If it succeed it will be followed by another volume — 'The Romance of Matters Parochial and Diocesan.' The sketches are often fragmentary and incomplete. This must be so where a due regard is paid to truth. The pathos and comedy of life are inseparably mixed up, but they are pretty evenly balanced, and I have left it so in my characters rather than draw on my own imagination.

Where I have ventured at times to give advice to Bishops (reckless man that I am), and my brethren of the clergy and laity, it is because my conclusions seem to me to be deducible from my measure of experience. As the years roll on the lights and shadows soften and change. It is looking back and taking a sober view that perhaps makes me state my opinions with what may appear to some too much confidence.

Should anyone be shocked at the title 'Cassock and Comedy,' why, then, I fall back upon an old mutual friend and quote—

> 'All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts.'

ATHOL FORBES.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	BABIES AND BAPTISM	1
II.	THE HUMOUR OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL	14
III.	THE HUMOUR OF PAROCHIAL VISITING	26
IV.	PUTTING IN THE BANNS . . .	38
V.	MARRIAGES	52
VI.	THE HUMOUR OF FUNERALS . .	66
VII.	MISSION WORK UNDER DIFFICULTIES .	77
VIII.	CHURCH WORKERS AND THEIR ECCENTRICITIES	90
IX.	CONCERNING CHURCHWARDENS AND VESTRY MEETINGS . . .	101

Contents

CHAP.		PAGE
X.	NEW CURATES AND THEIR FAULTS	115
XI.	ODDS AND ENDS	137
XII.	OUR ORGANISTS	151
XIII.	THE HUMOUR OF TEMPERANCE WORK	166
XIV.	THE HUMOUR OF PREACHERS AND PREACHING	181
XV.	BENEATH THE SURFACE	199

CASSOCK AND COMEDY

CHAPTER I

BABIES AND BAPTISM

I FEEL a very great responsibility in attempting this chapter about babies, and I am troubled with sundry misgivings as to the result. But how can a man write about baptisms without mentioning babies in general? And if one could succeed without referring to the little despots of family life, the risk of offending the mothers by such an omission is too great. Please do not get angry because I use the word despot to avoid tautology. Be patient with me, and I will perhaps justify its use. Englishmen, I know, are justly proud of their freedom. I have

sung as lustily as anyone, 'Britons never shall be slaves;' but, in spite of our boasting, this little king or queen in our midst upholds the flag of tyranny with calm, unconscious courage, and there is not a man or woman brave enough to question such right. And the same spirit, or want of it, is manifested in our domestic pets. I have heard a dog groan aloud as little, fat, dumpy fists have rained showers of blows on his nose, and that dainty reserved quadruped, the cat, will allow her fur to be torn out by the roots, satisfying herself by respectful and dignified protests. Try such a trick yourself, and pussy will soon put her paw down. At the earliest age baby is capable of binding the strongest will amongst us, and reducing its owner, however conscientious a man or woman, to a depth of hypocrisy which would be shocking if we were not all more or less partners in guilt. Baby is presented to the curate when he calls. It may be unwashed and present in colour all the appearances of a tortoiseshell cat, but that long-suffering cleric contorts his features into what is meant to be a smile expressive of de-

light at the condescension and admiration of the object. An expression of opinion is invited. 'What a fine little fellow! Girl, is it? Dear me, how stupid I am; why, of course, you can see that with half an eye. I wonder what Mrs A. meant by telling me it was a boy.' If baby is not satisfied, and she is easily offended, she quickly changes the expression of face into one which tells you so, and she gives vent to an aggrieved and prolonged howl. The mother speaks to the child and reassures her with a number of 'Did'ums frightenums den, never mind zen.' Some immediate relation whose age protects her at once assumes an injured air and tone, and exclaims *sotto voce*, 'Dear me, I never knew a baby cry at the curate who used to visit me.' However, you go on contorting your face and making ridiculous attempts at baby lingo. This generally has the effect of increasing the intensity of the howling, and if you are wise you will retreat. If the father is present you can stay on, as he is sure to see that you get a fair hearing; and you can secure his sympathy by swearing

that the child is his living image. You must be careful how you do it. A good plan is to look astonished yourself, as if it were the most miraculous thing in the world that the child should be like the father. He will possibly put you off, and say, 'Go on,' but he will qualify it by adding, 'He is like his grandad, my father, that is.' Finally he will agree with you that 'maybe there's something in what you say.' But this is the only safe comment to make on the child. You know, of course, that the face is as much like that of the father, or any other grown-up person, as a mass of shapeless dough resembles the Apollo Belvedere, but by this time the little tyrant has so far mastered you that you go on shamelessly asserting that the little piece of humanity is like some one or other, throwing all morality to the winds.

I called one day to inquire after a baby which had not been brought to Holy Baptism. The object of my visit was on the hearthrug, or what did duty as such. While I talked with the mother, the mental attitude of the

little angel was a study. Then she began to edge nearer the cat. Vain pussy, why would you wave that tail of yours so near danger. Suddenly there was a wild clutch and a yell of delight and triumph, and pussy is desperately hanging on to the hearthrug, while the despot hauls away at the tail as if his life depended on having the brush. 'Oh, naughty! you'll hurt the nice pussy cat.' I was wrong to say it, but the pleading in the eyes of the patient cat unmanned me, and the fatal words had escaped me before I was quite conscious of interference. Ooh! Ooh!! Boooo!!! There the visit was rendered quite futile by my harshness. The mother would hear no more from me that day. How could she allow such a man to baptise her baby? Did'ums, did'ums! and the mother clasps her young hopeful to her bosom, and regards you as much as to say, 'No, you shall not hurt this child's feelings. This breast shall stand between you and your cruelty.' Sometimes the tyrant is only brought to church when he has blossomed out into short frocks and corkscrew curls, looking for

all the world like sausages. You look at him when you arrive at the font, and endeavour to reassure him with your most seductive smile. His finger at once goes into his mouth, his head nestles closely in to his mother's hand, and he does his best to bury it in her garments. Then you come to the fatal moment. 'Name this child.' Sometimes the novelty of the position, or the vanity of being selected as the only one of the party for this special distinction, is pleasing to him, and things go through without a hitch. But frequently he has had enough of the service by this time, and he either lies down and screams, or makes a desperate effort to escape. A colleague of mine once had to chase a youngster of three and a half round the churchyard before he was secured and baptised.

'What is that the child has?' I asked of a mother as she passed her baby to me to be 'sprinkled,' as they call it. 'Coal, sir. It is the only thing to keep her quiet.' 'Very well,' I said, as I tucked in my clean surplice. 'Name this child.' 'Gwendoline Maude Geral-

dine,' she responded. I suppose the coal was used to keep the child contented while the mother read the penny dreadfuls.

Another dangerous time for the curate is when baby begins to talk and takes notice of things. As a great compliment to you, the mother says to the wee one, 'Where's Mr Benedict?' and the little mite points to the cat or the coal scuttle. 'No, no, baby, where's Mr Benedict?' and then the deceitful mother barefacedly directs attention to you, and after eighteen efforts baby points to you with perhaps a Goo! Goo! You must at once go into ecstasies of joy. The cleverness of the little genius must burst upon you like a thunderclap. 'You have never seen anything like it.' Perhaps he may go on to call you dad, dad. 'Well, that is strange, I am rather like him,' you say. 'Nonsense!' says the proud mother. 'Yes, I am,' you correct, in a way that tells you will not be contradicted. If you can get angry on the subject you score a tremendous victory. 'Well, now, when I come to look at you, of course you are rather like my George.

To think that the little sweet'ums should have seen that, and I never noticed it before!' Probably not. It would have been surprising if she had; but you are mollified, though still on your dignity. The father of that child will be sure to turn up at the christening.

'You don't know what the child says?' and the indignant mother glared at me. 'Don't he speak plain enough?' The child in question was about fifteen months old, and quite incapable of speech, but he met my advances this unfortunate day with a flow of early English which was astonishing. 'Gee-ge-go-oo! Bah!' was all I could make out. But in my ignorance I did not follow. It turned out that he was promulgating some theories about horses, that they were highly dangerous, and he was warning me to avoid them. But in my stupidity I shook my head and remarked, 'Ah, you'll soon be able to talk.' This was quite sufficient. I had put my foot in it. The child could, as a matter of fact, say anything and everything, only I was deaf or dense. Here again the mother found it necessary to

snatch up the little theorist in order to protect him from my brutality.

It is indeed an awful moment when the child is delivered into your arms for the holy rite. The nurse's bosom heaves with indignation as you crumple up the stiff, starchy long clothes. She looks at the mother as much as to say, 'Are you not going to remonstrate? He will be crumpling up the baby next.' Then there is the godmother who resents the lavish use of water, and literally snatches the child out of your arms in her anger when the ceremony is over. At the last moment, perhaps, the baby exhibits strong objections to being baptised at all, and you find your thumb clutched by tiny fingers which steadily refuse to relax. Dear wee mites, if we were not dignified curates we would kiss them all—if we followed the promptings of our hearts; but that would never do. Babies grow up and—but of course we must be above such displays of weakness. Sometimes in the vestry you forget the child's name, or there are so many to be entered that you fail to distinguish one child from another. 'Let me see, what was

the name again?' you ask innocently. Oh, you hapless mortal, you have put your foot into it. 'Why, sir, I told you her name was Ethel May Jubilee June Browne, and you gave it her yourself,' and the mother looks at you reproachfully, and, of course, flattens the nose of the baby against her breast. This is to assure the little darling of protection, and to inform the bairn that her mother will not allow her to be affronted with impunity.

A wise, experienced curate will say, having no idea of the name, 'Now we must have this right, you know. You spell the names as I write them;' and you are safe.

Sometimes in order to please the mother you say, 'Let me feel the weight of him again;' and the lump of humanity and clothes is handed to you. But baby resents it. His dolorous shrieks awake the echoes and startle the cats in the churchyard. You feel like a criminal, and hasten to produce your watch, or someone else's, in order to conciliate him. Sometimes the tyrant is bent on mischief, and greets a pale nervous young curate with cries of 'Dad! dad!' while the

uncles and the father and others laugh, and think the joke simply too funny for anything. A demure young woman looks reprovingly severe, and then takes to giggling all the time, making, of course, ostentatious efforts to control herself.

Baby worship, what sins you have to answer for; and yet this world would somehow be a dreary place without the cause of it. A baby gives happiness that cannot be valued in money or dealt with in arithmetic. There is the uncle, a big ruffianly fellow who spends the half of his time in gaol, but he turns up to the christening of the little nipper, and submits to be bullied by his chubby nephew, and perhaps the same evening half kills a couple of policemen. He calls for you in the middle of the night to come and sprinkle the kid at No. 7 Tinners' Entry, and proceeds on his way to rob a house or crack a shop. One of the most dangerous criminals I know was captured by the police whilst rocking the cradle in which his sister's infant lay asleep. 'Hold on!' he said, as they closed upon him, 'let me get someone to look after the kid, and I'll come quietly.' They procured a trusty

neighbour, and he got up without another word and held out his hands for the steels. A prize-fighter who lived in the parish once came as one of the christening party, and he carried the infant. A few days previous he had been badly beaten or badly punished in some fight. His face was one mass of bruises and cuts, and looked as if it were held together with sticking plaster. That baby pommelled his battered face right merrily, and the pain must have been agonising, but not a sound from the bulldog-looking nurse. It pleased the baby, and he would have died rather than show a sign of the pain he was enduring.

And what shall we say of the mother's love? Sometimes I think we men are of too rough a fibre to realise it, but the look in a mother's face as she nurses her babe is one of those mysterious helps which we come across at times meant to bring us a step nearer to the Divine, and we feel that we have seen something of it, and that the soul of man is something very real and tangible. The pure discerning mind of Raphael caught it, and his unerring hand

reproduced it in his wonderful conception of the Blessed Virgin.

Yes, we have our fun about King Baby; we know what a despot he is in his government; we admit it and acquiesce. And the more we submit the better we are for it. How could it be otherwise? Are they not in nearer touch with the other world?—fresh from the mint of God.

CHAPTER II

THE HUMOUR OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

A LITTLE boy was saying his prayers at his mother's knee. 'Have you not forgotten something?' said the parent, when the little lad finished.

'No, mother,' answered her son.

'You have omitted to mention your grandmother's safety.'

'But I didn't know she had one,' replied the little fellow, as his eyes sparkled with prospective pleasure.

So many times children take us up wrong; or is it that we do not make ourselves quite clear? An old vicar of mine used to say, 'When you are teaching children, aim not only at being understood, but speak so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood.'

'What was the mother of Moses forced to do with him soon after he was born?' I asked a class of boys.

'Please, sir, she thrashed him.'

Not a boy in the class smiled; all took his answer in earnest. I might add that we had just read the second chapter of Exodus.

'But what makes you say that his mother thrashed him?' I asked.

'Please, sir, in the third verse it says, "When she could no longer *hide* him."'

In the north country the word hide carries a significance which the sagacity of the reader will readily grasp. We often speak of children answering thoughtlessly. This does occur, but not so often as teachers think. If they care to look into things, they will very often find that the fault is rather with themselves, or that the words used have another meaning. A child should never be laughed at for any answer given, but every effort should be made to find out why a wrong response has been made.

A dear old clergyman whom I knew, who was noted for his careless manner of dressing,

was one day catechising a class of girls of from eight to eleven. The old man had a large nose, a good-humoured, kind, big, ugly face, I might add. In his remarks he used the word 'biped.' Conscious that this might probably be beyond them, he went back to explain that a biped was a two-legged animal, and a quadruped a four-legged one. 'Now, children,' he said, 'what am I?'

A little girl of eight put up her hand eagerly.

'Well, my child, you tell me.'

'Please, sir, you're an ugly one.' Evidently she thought this threw light on the subject. For a moment he was nonplussed, but he laughed, and patted the little maid on the head. 'So I am, dear, so I am,' he said; and he often told the tale against himself.

I was once taking a service for children. They had all been gathered in from the slums surrounding the mission room. Each child was to be presented with a bunch of flowers, a present from a Sunday school attached to the parish church. I was speak-

ing to them about the beauty of the roses, one of which I held in my hand.

'Now, can you tell me anything more beautiful?' I asked, and I held up the flower.

A poor, half-clad mite of a girl held up her little black hand.

'Well, do you know something more beautiful?'

'Yes, sir. A red herring.'

One felt inclined to smile and inclined to cry. The poor little half-starved face — so white—so pale—so earnest in her reply. A red herring represented luxury to her. Beauty was beyond her comprehension altogether, for she had never been out of the low, squalid alleys in which her home lay.

Very often at the end of a lesson I would invite questions from the children, bearing, of course, on the subject taught. Once I said, 'Have any of you any questions you would like to ask me?' Unfortunately I spoke in a general way, and it was immediately understood as such by one girl, who put up her hand and said, 'Please, sir, are you going

to see the pantomime?' I found out afterwards that my little friend was attending rehearsals, and as she was to be a fairy, she was anxious that I should see how neatly she could dance. Before next Christmas came round, poor little Susy lay dying. I sat by her bedside peeling an orange. Suddenly she said, 'I know what Heaven will be like,' and her face lighted up with pleasure.

'Do you?' I remarked.

'Oh, yes. It will be a grand, big pantomime.'

That same year all the children were given Christmas cards.

'Are those angels?' a child of nine asked me, pointing to the well-known representation of cherubim by Raphael.

'Yes,' I answered.

'Won't they get cold among those damp clouds with so little on?'

One of the mothers called to see me after a prize distribution. She was shown in, and from under her shawl produced the prize given to her daughter that same evening.

'Do you mind changing this book, sir?' she said.

'Why?' I asked, rather surprised at her request.

'Well, sir, if you just look at the front page, it begins, "Charlotte Freeman's father was a drunkard;" and if my good man saw that he would kick the house out of the windows.'

It was an unfortunate coincidence that the prize-winner's name was Charlotte Freeman, and the father was one of the secretaries to the local temperance movement. I immediately changed the book, and after that more care was exercised in regard to the prizes and prize-winners. It would indeed have been very awkward indeed if Mr Freeman had got hold of that book, for he was a man with a very hasty temper.

The church at which I served was dedicated to 'All Saints.' On that great festival special services were held in which children took their part. The day schools had holiday in order that they might attend matins. I gave the

address. At the close, I put a few questions; one was, 'What will the next great festival be which the Church will keep?'

A boy shouted out, 'Please, sir, the Sunday school treat.' He was quite right as regards our own particular parish. I am afraid the Vicar considered my acceptance of the answer as nothing short of levity, but it was a reply to my question.

One day in Sunday school, in order to illustrate further a Bible lesson, I drew a map of Palestine on the blackboard with chalk. We were getting on very well. 'What is this mountain here?' I asked, pointing to the rock promontory of Carmel.

No response, but a profound scrutiny in the face of my hearers.

'You, my lad,' and I turned to a youth standing near me, and repeating the question.

'It isn't a mountain at all,' he replied quietly.

'Then what is it?' I asked, wondering what was coming.

'Chalk!' This was said quite seriously;

there was no attempt to be sharp or funny.

It is difficult at times to restrain and keep in check one's risible faculties, but I gladly welcomed these little unconscious sallies of wit. In the hard, grinding poverty and the uphill work of Church ministration in the slums, they come like flashes of sunshine, and help, in their way, to brighten up the darker pages of a clergyman's life. Without them one's existence would be almost unbearable at times. One more incident on this subject. We were talking about the Queen of Sheba. One boy gravely informed me that she came by the railway to see Solomon. 'Goods train,' he suggested, when questioned further. This rather staggered me, and had it not been for the boy's serious face, I should have thought he was larking. 'Please, sir, the Bible says she came with a *heavy train!*' I had overlooked that fact. This shows the importance of detail.

'Did you speak to your mother about getting you a prayer book?' I said to one of

the girls as she came into the school. 'Yes, sir,' she replied; 'and mother says she will get me one after her next refinement, if that will do!' The answer was rather indefinite, but it had to suffice for the present. A few days afterwards she came up to me in great glee, and whispered, as if about to impart a great secret, 'Mother expects a refinement this next week,' and she nodded her head with a mysterious air. The little maid was the daughter of a woman who helped to keep her home together by attending midwifery cases.

Another occasion the Prodigal Son was the subject. Why was it that he was glad to look after the swine? 'Because he wanted to pull their ears,' was one reply. 'So that he could steal one,' was another. 'Because he had larnt no trade,' was the solution an older lad offered. 'But what else could he have done?' I asked. 'Gone to the work-house,' shouted a class of lads in chorus. In order to bring out the misery of the prodigal's condition, I pointed out his state of utter

degradation and want. 'And what was the cause of this?' I asked. 'Please, sir, because he did not belong to the Labourers' Union;' and I could see that this answer was regarded as a most satisfactory solution by the older ones in the school.

One amusing answer, with a great deal of hidden common sense behind it, was given by a boy of ten. I was speaking to the school about John the Baptist. Why did he send his disciples with such questions to Christ? 'Because he had nothing else to do!' While another lad suggested that it might be because he was feeling 'downhearted at never having nothing to do.'

Where was the Baptist to be found generally? 'In the kitty,' was the curious reply. I may say that 'kitty' is another term for gaol. Why did he preach in the wilderness? 'Because the police wouldn't let him preach in the streets,' was the brilliant thought of one of my smartest boys who ranked first in Scripture. No one laughed. No one even smiled. These replies were genuine and thoughtful answers to

the questions, which they interpreted according to their knowledge of life and its conditions. A thoughtful answer, however wrong it may be, I always gave credit for. The real object of catechising, in my opinion, is to teach children not so much to answer as to think. If teachers would only bear this in mind, it would produce — I speak from experience — splendid results. The work may be slow, but it is solid. This, of course, should be backed up with a few short definitions at the close. I found the children enjoyed making up definitions. Often I would give a long definition, then there was a competition to see who could put the same thing into the fewest number of words. Another point— give children an opportunity of questioning you. Occasionally an afternoon was set aside for this in church, and such a Sunday was always looked forward to with supreme joy. A large number of the parents would come to hear Johnny or Susy question the parson. Often the parents themselves supplied the questions on matters which they

felt required more light; and, from all circumstances considered, I heartily recommend this plan to my fellow-workers, clerical and lay, among the younger plants of our Master's vineyard. Don't say, 'Cannot be done.' If you do, you may be sure you are in the wrong place, and it is your duty to give way to better men.

CHAPTER III

THE HUMOUR OF PAROCHIAL VISITING

'WHERE are you living now, Mary?' I asked of a girl who passed me in one of the main streets of the parish, and who had left school a few years ago to go out to service.

'I arn't living now, sir,' she replied; 'I'm married.'

Trafalgar Street was rather a rough neighbourhood. The houses were big, and in olden days good substantial people lived in them, but in my time they were let out in tenements. I was visiting in this quarter one afternoon, and was making my way upstairs in one of the houses, when I was startled by a crash, and a large piece of crockery struck the wall, and burst around me like a shell. Before I could recover from my surprise, it was followed by

a basin, which smashed in the immediate vicinity of my head.

'What on earth are you trying to do?' I shouted.

'Oh, Mr Curate, I beg your pardon, sir, but I thought it was that good-for-nothing husband of mine. Come upstairs, sir, I am pleased to see you.' She was a kind, good mother, but she possessed a demon of a temper. 'Me and Geordie had a bit of a tift this morning,' she went on by way of explanation ; and this was to have been his reception, but I got it instead. However, she made up for it by coming regularly to church afterwards.

Speaking of crockery, a great character in the parish was Peggy Potts. It was an appropriate name, for she was a hawker of pottery of a cheap kind. She was very big, very stout, and very strong. One of the curates at the parish church wore his hair long. He used to write poetry. Well, one day Peggy Potts, for the edification of some of her companions, leaned out of a neighbour's window beneath which his reverence was standing, and

grasping him by the hair, lifted him clean off his feet! He was very angry, and insisted upon Peggy apologising, which she did. Unfortunately at times she used 'to go on the beer,' as they termed it there. Then Peggy was the terror of the neighbourhood. She would sit at her window and take shots at people as they passed. She occupied a room on the fifth storey, and her position commanded the leading thoroughfare to the quay. All the business men passed this way, and many amusing scenes were witnessed as the gentlemen in top hats tried to dodge the fire from the battery over which Peggy presided. Apart from her drinking bouts, she was a kind, motherly person, generous to a fault, and a good friend to the poor. When sober, she earned a respectable amount, as she had quite an old-established business.

One morning I was just coming out of the church, and I spied Peggy with the window up, waiting to have a shot at the men as soon as they would pass on their way to business. A half-starved musician took up his position

immediately beneath, and had just got the first bar of the 'Last Rose of Summer' on his trombone, when smash! and a large pie-dish broke on the top of his head. There were shrieks of laughter from Peggy and her companions. I crossed the road. The poor man was smothered with the remains of a rabbit pie and his hat, which was crushed down over his eyes—so much so, that I had to remove it with my penknife. I was angry at the plight of the poor hungry fellow, so I told him to come up with me and I would speak to Peggy. But he elected to remain downstairs while I ascended to interview the Amazon who had done the mischief.

'Well, Mr Curate, what did you think of that shot?' was the question with which she greeted me.

'Peggy,' I said, in a tone of grief, 'why did you do that? I think you ought to be ashamed of your cruel action. The hungry face of the man surely ought to have appealed to you. I never thought you would injure anyone who was down. Peggy, really I am ashamed of you,' I repeated severely.

Poor Peggy melted into tears at once. The man was given a half-crown and a good hearty meal. In the afternoon she had his 'bairns' up, and they were fed royally. Afterwards, I suppose, the itinerant musician passed on to some other town.

Peggy was occasionally brought before the magistrates for the mischievous trick of pelting people with mugs and basins, but everyone in court laughed, and men gave up having her summoned. Yet her good points were many. Her room was spotlessly clean, and each day she put on a clean big apron. She always subscribed to what was going on in the parish—sums, too, that were paid frequently in gold.

One of my first visits rather shocked me. Remember I was only a deacon of two days' standing. The Vicar showed me my particular district, and in the afternoon I made a beginning. I went up to the first house in a street, and knocked. Immediately all the heads in that particular quarter appeared at the windows. A clean, tidy woman opened the door ; with a

bright face she asked me to enter, and with her apron she dusted a chair.

'I am the new curate,' I began; and the following dialogue took place.

'Indeed, sir!'

'So I thought I should like to call and make your acquaintance.'

'Oh, thank you, sir. It is very kind of you.'

'Are you a member of the Church—'

'A member of the Church—the *old* Church? I should just think I am. So was my father and grandfather afore me.'

This was jerked out with considerable spirit.

'Did you get to service on Sunday?' I continued.

'Last Sunday, sir?'

'Yes.'

'Well, no. I didn't get last Sunday.'

'How long ago is it since you were at church?'

'Well, sir, when I come to remember, it's getting on to a canny bit now. Time slips away, sir—but I never go anywhere else.'

'Yes; but I should like to know,' I persisted.

'Well, sir, you'll see me there soon.'

'I hope so. But do tell me when you went last; I want to make a note in this,' showing her my visiting book.

She got up, and, opening a window that looked out into the yard, she shouted, 'Geordie, how long is it since our Bill was christened?'

'Why, he was nineteen year old last Christmas,' came back the reply from the husband, who was chopping wood.

'Yes, sir,' replied the good woman. 'It is a canny bit, as I said. It's nineteen years ago! The people next door are Church folk!' She was anxious to change the subject.

I wondered if they attended as regularly. However, I had a long chat with her. I also interviewed the husband—through the window—who still continued to chop his sticks with the vigour characteristic of north countrymen, but he promised to come and hear me, as he put it. We became fast friends before long.

He had a mania for chopping up firewood, and flying pigeons.

On one occasion I had to visit the parents of a boy who had been causing his teacher more than an ordinary amount of trouble. The mother was a most respectable woman, and she was very much upset when I told her the doings of young Dick.

'Did he do that?' she asked, when I told her of the mischief her young lad had done.

'He did indeed,' I replied.

'Then I'll *finish* him,' she said, and forthwith she began to double up her sleeves determinedly, as if in preparation for the deed.

'No, no,' I remonstrated. 'Talk to him this time, and if it occur again, then punish him.'

'No, I'll finish him now,' she said; 'and, what is more, I'll tell his father, and he will finish him too!'

What happened to Master Dick I never knew, but he was indeed an exemplary boy afterwards.

One snowy day a lad in the day schools

threw a snowball at a colleague of mine. I caught the young rascal, and boxed his ears well. Retiring to a distance, he indulged in some pretty strong language by way of commenting on things generally. As he had added to this other misdemeanours, I resolved to see his parents. The mother listened to my story, and I mentioned that he swore at me.

'He swore?' she repeated in amazement.

'He did,' I assured her.

'Well, he must be a little ——. He never heard me swear, nor his father. I'll give that young man a —— good hiding.'

I might say that in this north country town, words which would horrify south country people are used there in ordinary greetings. One very foul-sounding word is a term of endearment. But to keep a straight face was a sore trial to a novice.

'Please go away, sir,' said a woman whose house I had entered whilst on my rounds. 'Go, sir, at once, *please*. My man is drunk, and he is chasing the Vicar now down the back lane

with the frying pan!' I left the good woman, who seemed considerably relieved to get quit of me, and proceeded to my Vicar's assistance. True enough, he was a prisoner in a yard, while an infuriated man, in a pair of trousers and a shirt, hammered the door with a huge frying pan, demanding admittance for the purpose of finishing the parson. The man, of course, was mad with drink, so I took the frying pan away from him, and persuaded him to put off killing my Vicar until Sunday was over. I explained that the whole work would fall upon me, as it was Saturday, and there was not time to get another clergyman. Under the circumstances, the man acceded to my request. He and I were rather friendly, and consideration for me carried the day. I am afraid my Vicar had been rather injudicious in some of his remarks.

'Did you like my sermon?' I asked one day in a cottage. Please excuse me; it was my first one, and I was longing for a pat on the back.

'Yes; I liked it—'cos it was short,' was the

reply from the old woman. The hint was not lost upon me; after that short sermons.

On the occasion of a great festival, the Vicar of an adjacent church preached. He was much run after as a preacher, and was indeed a most eloquent man. In speaking, he often put himself in the place of a penitent sinner. For example, he would say, 'I have been very wicked; I have been in gaol; I have stolen things; used bad language; but I am not going to do it again. I will never touch the drink in future,' etc., etc.

Well, after this sermon I called upon a poor old woman of eighty-odd years.

'Come in, hinny; come in, hinny,' she said, as soon as she spied me. 'Sit down, hinny. I say, what an awful man Canon —— must have been once. He told us last night that he used to get drunk, stole things, and that he had been in gaol. That is, of course, before he got converted like. But who would think it to look at him now?'

I told the Canon the next time I met him of the effect of his sermon. He certainly did not

see the humour of the thing at all. In fact, he rather resented it. He is a bishop now.

'Come in, you little ——. It's time to say your prayers and go to bed.' This was what I heard one summer evening in the vicinity of the church. It was the way a mother summoned her little son to his devotions and rest. Just as one might say, 'Come here, my little pet.'

'It is very quaint,' remarked one of my colleagues to a district visitor who was anxious to do some slumming.

'It is shocking,' said the young lady's mother. 'I could not think of my daughter visiting such people.'

CHAPTER IV

PUTTING IN THE BANNS

One would naturally think that the poorer classes would always be married by banns, but this is far from being the case. At one time I would remonstrate and point out to the bride and bridegroom that whereas marriage by banns would cost only 10s. 7d., marriage certificate included, a license would be £3, 3s. Advice in such matters is generally resented.

'My mother was married by license, and her mother before her, sir, so I think I ought to be.'

The man is generally indifferent, but it is a vital point with the women. They may be beginning life on a pound a week, or less, yet they will go to the additional expense.

I had a curious request once. An elderly man, a farmer, called upon me.

'I'm thinking about getting married, Vicar,' he began, 'and I want to know whether you will be so good as to give me a license.'

'Certainly,' I said. 'Who is the happy lady?'

'Well, sir,' and he scratched his head, 'that's not quite settled.'

'But I cannot give you a license until it is,' I replied.

'Couldn't you give me the license and leave the lady's name blank, so that it could be filled up afterwards?'

I laughed, and shook my head.

'Well, I was just going to call round among one or two ladies of my acquaintance this afternoon, and I thought as I was passing the Vicarage I might as well get the license.'

'But you don't know whether any of your friends will accept you as a husband,' I remarked.

'Oh, bless you, yes, sir. Men are rather scarce about here.'

Later in the day he called again, and this time he had the lady with him.

I once knew a man who had great difficulty in getting a wife. He was then incumbent of a new parish in a big north country town. He was, I might add, a widower with one little girl ; a good-natured little man, and a hard worker. I was one of a band of curates at a church in the same city, and he used to consult us ; and, fond of the joke, we would recommend him to various marriageable acquaintances, among whom, I fear, we placed a large number of our lady friends irrespective of age. This afforded us very great amusement, especially when he called to tell us the results. One day we suggested a lady, rich, tall and big, who had seen thirty summers, though she did not look more than twenty-two or three. We always considered her rather 'high falutin.' She was the daughter of a wealthy tradesman who had retired, and the family had gone in for a 'place' in the country, and cultivated society assiduously. They drove into the city each day for shopping, and, it was reported, gave themselves great airs with the

'common shop' people. To this house with six daughters we recommended our elder brother.

'Which one?' he asked simply.

We all agreed that it should be the one whom he met first; that, really, we could not pick out one and say she was the best.

Our friend, who was a meek man, thought that his chance might be better if he asked the oldest, who generally went by the name of a rather sour wine. He went off on his errand, and we young curates waited impatiently for the result. We were quite sure that the Misses —— flew for higher game. To our amazement, he returned radiant with smiles. He had been accepted by the youngest! A more contented couple now no one could find. So was fulfilled the old saying, 'All's well that ends well.'

Those were happy days, in spite of hard work amidst grinding poverty. One of the curates of our house became engaged to a nice girl who was on a visit to the city. We had all been more or less admirers of Nellie, and we

all subscribed to buy the engagement ring, a pretty half-hoop of pearls and diamonds. Her letters were eagerly looked for, and whoever found the letter opened it and read. It was generally understood that we each had an interest in Nellie's letters, and one day we were greatly hurt because our brother cleric who was the happy man, instead of leaving the usual morning letter behind, put it in his pocket and went out. At breakfast we looked for it in vain, and when the engaged one came in for tea, he got a warmish reception. I am not betraying any confidences, and I know Nellie has no objection to me relating this, even if her friends identify her. We all took a vow of celibacy when she married. I mean among ourselves it was generally understood that from henceforth the world was a blank in the direction of marriage, and we resolved, therefore—it was an easy step, under such circumstances—to renounce it for ever. One man was so cut up that the Vicar gave him a holiday, and two days afterwards he wrote to say that he had met the most adorable creature in the world. 'She

was even as beautiful and as nice as Nellie.' This we all resented, but he believed it and acted upon it, and we read his banns.

I brought a nice hornet's nest about my ears the very week after I was ordained. Someone sent me banns to be published the following Sunday, and I, without question, entered them in the book kept for that purpose. When they were read out by the officiating priest, there was quite a commotion in the church. The Vicar glared, the choir smiled, and the organist was so far carried away by his hilarity that he forgot his duties at the organ. Some wag had sent in the names of the superintendent of one Sunday school and the lady in charge of another —Miss Stocks. I did not know then that the gentleman was a little man who was known to live in constant dread of the lady with whom he was coupled. I received a 'slating' from my Vicar, and I was not caught napping again in an affair of this kind.

A young lady called at the Vicarage one day since I received my present appointment, to put in the banns. 'What is the name of the gentle-

man' (you must never say *man*, it would be considered rude) 'whom you wish to marry?' I asked.

'The gentleman I *wish* to marry?' she repeated.

'Yes,' I said, 'the gentleman you are going to marry.'

'But you said the gentleman I *wished* to marry.'

'Well, it is all the same,' I remarked.

'Oh, dear, no!' she ejaculated. 'The gentleman I am going to marry is not the one I *wish* to marry;' and she added with a sigh, 'I wish it was.' Then she unfolded a tale. 'You see, sir, it is this way. John Larkins has been comin' to our house now nigh on ten years. He sits and smokes with father, and him and me is very friendly, but he never mentions marrying me. I am very fond of him, but when a girl is near thirty, as I am, it doesn't do to wait longer. Will Cony proposed to me last night on the pier, so I accepted him, but I only wish it had been John. I am sure I have done my share of the courting as far as any self-

respecting girl can, so I have made up my mind to accept this offer while I have the chance. Men are soon snapped up here.'

'Does John know that you have accepted William?'

'No; I didn't tell him.'

'Well, Martha,' I said, 'you take my advice. Leave it open for the present, and when you see John tell him, and see what he says.'

'I don't like to do that,' she said.

'But you had better do it,' I advised. 'He may be wanting to marry you all along.'

Her eyes brightened. 'Could I mention your name, sir?' she asked.

'Certainly. Tell him I wished you to speak to him.'

Next morning Martha came to see me, blushing all over, and the name she gave in this time was that of the hesitating John. It appears that he had been fond of her for years, and was endeavouring to muster up courage to propose when Martha gave him the opportunity. I now agree with those people who say that ladies should have equal

rights with men in regard to popping the question. Many cases have come under my notice where there would have been greater happiness to-day if such conditions existed. The present arrangements are one-sided, and, from a long experience, I would cede this privilege to the sex.

One day the mother of a Sunday school teacher called at the church. She kept a grocer's shop on the quay, but, sad to say, she was addicted to a mild form of drinking. This morning she gave me a long account of the skipper of the *Susan*, who was in love with her 'darter'—the one who taught in the Sunday school. Finally she placed two shillings on the vestry table, and requested me to put in the banns. This was straightforward enough, so I entered them—James Metcalfe, of Harwich, bachelor; and Hannah Maria Martha Wilhelmina Gortslow Naylor, spinster. I remember the names well. The people used to smile as I read them out. On the Sunday Hannah Maria, etc., etc., was absent from the Sunday

school, and on the following day, as I happened to be in the neighbourhood, I looked into the shop to congratulate her. Never shall I forget my reception. Before I could get one word out she must have let fly at least a couple of hundred. The mother was there, quite sober, and she made signs to me which signified an explanation afterwards. Hannah Maria demanded to know on whose authority I had published her banns. She was a tall, handsome girl, with grand eyes, and they literally shot fire. I did not wish to give the mother away, so I waited for the fury to abate. At that moment, who should come into the shop but James Metcalfe, the other partner in this mistake. Hannah cooled down somewhat. I turned to him and explained that a mistake had been made, but I would go up at once and cross the names out of the book. He was very pleasant and quiet over the affair, which he heard for the first time. 'Don't worry about that, Hannah Maria. It's all right, sir; no offence,' and he nodded vigorously.

'Now, Hannah,' I said, 'I am very sorry if I have hurt your feelings. I will go at once and cross out the names.'

'Wait a moment, sir,' said the skipper. 'Isn't it rather a pity to spoil the book?' and he scrutinised my face in alarm at such a proposal.

'In what way?' I asked, rather astonished at this turn in events.

'Why, crossing out the names, to be sure. That won't look nice. Don't you think it would be a pity, Hannah, to spoil this gentleman's books?' But she was too angry to respond. However, Metcalfe pressed the matter. 'Now, Hannah,' he said coaxingly, 'what do you say? Shall we let them remain? Come, Hannah, there's a dear. What do you say?'

Hannah hung down her head. Then she turned away with a smile, and with her back to James said,—

'Please yourself!'

'Hannah!' James vociferated joyfully; and I being the nearest, he nearly knocked the life

out of me with a slap on the back, and then we all sat down to tea and bloaters.

A man called one day and asked me to put in the banns; at the same time he spun a long yarn about poverty, with a request to be let off the fees. I replied that if he were too poor to pay them, he was not rich enough to marry, and refused. He was rather surly about it, and went away with a grievance. The very next week he turned up again. 'You have found the money, then, this time?' I said. 'Yes; and I have found another gal, too!' was his reply.

In one family there were four marriages in less than eighteen months. 'You are getting rid or your large family quickly,' I remarked to the father, as the registers were being signed. 'Yes,' he answered, 'I only have two *hims* and one *her* left now!'

Only once in my experience have I heard banns publicly objected to in church. A lady jumped up suddenly, and, with a jerk, said, 'I forbid the banns.' The Vicar bowed, and said he would see her in the vestry afterwards. It

was for the third time of asking. When questioned, the lady was very excited, and said she had only heard that morning about her son's contemplated marriage. Her objection was that her son was still an infant. 'Who informed you that his banns were being published here?' I asked. 'From this letter,' and she produced an epistle from her pocket. I saw that it was anonymous, and called my Vicar's attention to the fact.

'Is your son at home, madam?' queried my chief.

'Yes,' she answered. I was told off to accompany her home, where we waited for the young scapegrace, who had been for a walk.

'You young scoundrel!' was the greeting, or rather the beginning of courtesies between him and his mother. The lad looked amazed, but his mother continued her torrent of language and used pretty strong words. 'I know nothing about it,' he said, when he got an opportunity. As it turned out, this was true. It was another man of the same

name, and some mischievous person had thought of this joke upon the young fellow and his mother, and had warned her by letter, with results as I have stated.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGES

One of the essentials on the wedding day itself is a coach and two horses with white ears. By white ears you must not understand the natural colour of the quadrupeds' aural appendages to be white, but this refers to the coverings. No maid with any self-respect would dream of being married without them. One day my temper was sorely tried. There was a marriage from a house almost opposite the church. I waited and waited. 'You had better go and see whether those people are coming,' I said to the clerk. 'It's all reet, sor,' he said when he returned, 'they're waiting for the coach.' 'That won't do,' I replied, 'for the coach was standing at the door as I passed.' 'Ay, that

was all reet, sor, but they had forgotten the white lugs!' Fortunately the couple who had refused to move without this piece of ritual turned up within five minutes, or I am afraid my patience would have given out.

I was marrying a sailor to a daughter of one of my people. During the service, Jack's attention seemed to be everywhere except where it ought to be. He was constantly recalled to a more concentrated state of mind by vigorous digs from the elbow of the bride elect. Suddenly he received one which almost knocked the breath out of his body. 'Can't I have a look round?' he jerked out. 'I haven't been in this place before.'

The mate of a collier was being married to the daughter of a respectable woman who supplied the smaller ships with vegetables and small stores.

'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?' I was beginning, when the bridegroom broke in with, 'I don't moind if I dew.' This is not quite so good as a brother cleric who was marrying his coachman to one of the ser-

vant maids. The Vicar asked the all-important question, 'Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?'

'After you, sir,' replied the man, as he touched his forelock!

I was particularly struck with the gentle, nice manners of a girl about eighteen and a youth of twenty for whom I performed the ceremony. I took quite a fancy to them. I learnt that the same night there was such a row between this loving pair that two policemen had to be called in, and they were so violent that the officers locked them up. Next day they were fined. Not a happy beginning to married life, unless it was that they meant to get all their quarrels over with one big fight. The deadly part was when the relatives arrived and took part in the fray. The police generally gave special attention to a house where a marriage or funeral was in prospect, particularly on the day itself. A fair amount of latitude was allowed, and I must give the police credit for great tact and management. A bobby is called upon often to act in cases which many

magistrates would shrink from, and the rough law, in which the magistrates would not perhaps support their officers, is generally acquiesced in by the people because it is just, and north countrymen have, when all is said and done, a grand natural idea of justice. Fair and square dealing is their boast and their pride, and is one of the secrets of their greatness in business, and large commercial undertakings.

I was once within an ace of a serious blunder. A marriage was fixed for ten o'clock, and I had an appointment with the Bishop at eleven-thirty. Half past ten, a quarter to eleven, and no bride or bridegroom. Presently the clerk announced their arrival. I went out. The couple stood in the usual place, at the entrance to the chancel, and I began the service.

'Please, sor—' began the man.

'Don't speak now,' I said, and continued the service.

'I am very sorry, sor, but—'

'Never mind now,' I said hastily. 'I can-

not listen to excuses, for I have no time to spare;' and again I went on with the marriage service. A movement on the part of the unhappy man caused me to look up. He was breathing with difficulty, his eyes were almost out of his head, his hair literally stood up, and the look of fear on his face made me pause.

'I am not the man!' he shrieked, like some frightened animal. 'I have only come to say the cab has broken down,' he gasped. 'I am only the best man, sor;' and, with a sigh of relief, he mopped his brow. All the while the lady smiled serenely. Poor man, he did get a fright—so did I, for I was new at the work, and did not know what the consequence might be.

A young woman in the parish, much against her parents' wishes, insisted upon marrying a man with a wooden leg. He was a widower, and in former days was said to have been very cruel to his first wife. This was all represented to Margaret Laidler, a big, fine young woman, who heard all but took her

own way. The wooden-legged man had some post on the railway, and no sooner was he married than he began his old tricks. He was dismissed from his situation for drunkenness, aggravated by insolence, and the rascal openly boasted that Margaret should keep him henceforth. Margaret stood his laziness for a time. Before her marriage she had been in a good family as servant, and had saved a little money. This twenty or thirty pounds was in the savings bank. She drew part to keep the house together for a time, and then buckled to, as she termed it, and began to earn money by going out to work. Her lord and master was the nuisance of the neighbourhood. He ran up a bill for drink at a low public-house, and when supplies were stopped, and a payment suggested on account, Margaret was called upon to pay. This she refused to do. Her husband ordered her to draw the rest of the money from the Post Office Savings Bank. But his wife had a will of her own, and told him frankly that she would do nothing of the kind, and suggested that he should try to

get a post of some kind. To this the affectionate husband replied by informing her that it was not his intention to work while he had someone to work for him, and he backed up his remark by a savage onslaught on his wife. But there he made a mistake. Margaret had him on his back; before he knew where he was his leg — the wooden one—was unstrapped, and Margaret was belabouring him right heartily. The neighbours, expecting murder, for the insulted wife was fairly roused, sent for me. Fortunately I was within easy distance, and was soon on the scene. Margaret and I were great friends, and I got her to pause. The husband lay howling on the ground, making piteous complaints and appeals to me. Then we had a council of war, and Margaret dictated her terms. She would maintain the home by her own exertions. He was to keep the house clean, cook the meals, and do all the household duties; and in order that he should not wander far from his work, Margaret was to take charge of his wooden leg. The penalty was to be another

good thrashing from his wife if he transgressed these rules or neglected his duties. Often when out for early services I have met Margaret trudging off to work, carrying the wooden leg with her to the houses where she did the washing. Once or twice she administered corporal punishment to her spouse, but in a short space of time he was a respectable member of society, and so far improved that Margaret would trust him with his leg for whole days together. I often wished that others in the parish had the pluck and determination of this sturdy specimen of Northumbrian womanhood. Once she called at the church to tell me that John was anxious to take the pledge, so I called. No sooner was the pledge signed than he begged me to use my influence with his wife. He wanted to see a football match on the coming Saturday, and he thought if I would speak to his partner she might possibly let him have his leg.

As a rule at marriages, the most self-possessed person present is the bride. She it is generally who puts up the banns and makes all

the arrangements. The responses are known by heart, and given straight off the reel, but the bridegroom is ever a nervous blunderer.

There are many jokes about the ring. Let me relate one. The bridegroom on this occasion was the skipper of a steam tug, and his mate was best man. I asked him to deposit the ring on the book. Blank bewilderment on the face of the man. A vigorous search began; pockets were turned out; the floor scrutinised to see if he had dropped it, but no ring. Billy, the mate, was despatched to the tug, which was lying at the quay. He returned with a man's earring, a round loop of gold, but not the wedding ring. Throughout the service I noticed that the skipper was chewing something. I interrogated. It was the ring, but no longer recognisable as such. He had chewed it out of shape. So the large earring was used, and the bride gave her husband a warm address in the vestry afterwards.

A rather smart girl, the daughter of a publican

in the district, was being married to a man who described himself as a gentleman. There was a crowded church, and about a dozen bridesmaids. The bride refused to say 'obey.' For a second or so she ignored the word, then positively refused, and turned round to the young ladies behind with a knowing laugh. The bridegroom looked confused and foolish, and a titter went the round of the bridal party. 'I won't say it if I think about it the whole morning,' she said, rather insolently, in reply to a suggestion of mine that she had better reconsider her refusal. 'Well, then, you had better take longer—say a week or a month,' I quietly replied, and, amidst the death-like silence, I closed the book and walked away to the vestry. Result—a flood of tears, an apology, and a pathetic appeal to continue the service. For a time I was obdurate. At last I consented to leave the vestry, where I was besieged with the tearful bride and her maids, and continue the service. She answered distinctly enough when the 'obey' came the second time.

Funny incidents occur in the responses. 'I

thee endow' is a pitfall for many. 'I thee and thou,' is a favourite rendering, while 'I there end thou' is another, and 'I here end thou.' 'I plight thee my troth.' The stumbling block here is the word troth. Trot, trough, truth are the answers often given. One bridegroom was very particular. He repeated the words correctly, and then added quickly, 'What's that, governor?'

'Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?' once led to an altercation.

'I do,' said the father.

'No, you don't,' said the mother. 'She's *my* darter.' It turned out afterwards that the bride was her child by a former husband.

A middle-aged mariner called to see me one day. After a great deal of beating about the bush he jerked, 'Margaret Foster's all right, an't she?'

'Oh, yes,' I hastened to assure him.

'And you'll marry us?'

'Yes,' I answered.

'Well, now, look here, governor. I want this

thing done properly. What do you generally charge?'

'Seven and sixpence,' I answered amusedly, 'and two and sevenpence more if you require a certificate.'

'We wants everything,' he said; 'but seven and sixpence won't do for me. I wants this thing done once and for all, right, fair and square; and I would rather pay a proper price than have any hitch. Here, governor, make it a two pound wedding,' and he laid two sovereigns on the table. 'I don't trust much to these cheap affairs,' he added, as he took up his billycock hat. It was useless to debate the point, and the two pounds, or rather the change, went to the poor fund.

My Vicar used to tell an amusing story. After marrying a couple the man grinned, and said he had no money to pay. A rule was made then that for the future, in accordance with the rubric, the money was to be placed on the book, together with the ring. Some years afterwards, the man who had got off his

fees came again to be married, and this time placed the money on the book. My Vicar calmly removed it and said, 'That is for the last. Now pay for this;' and with a crest-fallen look the man took out his purse and produced the second fees.

Twice a couple came to church to be married, and on each occasion he had to be assisted up the steps. I refused to marry a drunken man, and sent him away. The mother of the bride called to see me. I told her firmly that I would never marry him until he came sober. 'Then Jennie had better look about for someone else,' she replied, without further words, 'for I never saw the man sober.' Jennie was successful in her search, for shortly afterwards she married a steady young mechanic, and often expressed to me her gratitude for the two occasions above mentioned.

An old sea captain consulted me once about his daughters, four smart, rosy girls of from seventeen to twenty-six, or so. 'I can't get husbands for them,' he said. 'I have done my best, and I am sure they have done *their* best.

Now, Mr Vicar, can you help me? There's three thousand for each on her wedding day, and an extra five hundred for the first married!'

CHAPTER VI

THE HUMOUR OF FUNERALS

THE title may strike some as being rather suggestive of flippancy, if not irreverence, in dealing with so serious and solemn a subject. Let me say at the outset that nothing is further from my intention. But those who have had any experience of the ups and downs of life, know that side by side with the deepest and saddest tragedies there is always an accompaniment of unconscious humour and comicality. A funeral in the north of England is quite looked forward to by the sorrowing friends and relatives as an event of the greatest importance, and money is lavishly spent—wasted, I might say—in the efforts to outdo some other funeral in the same street.

'I think everyone enjoyed themselves,' was

the remark of a man to me who had lost his wife, and who was, according to custom, receiving visitors after the burial. A woman lost her husband by an accident in one of the shipyards. It was a distressing case, and I was wondering what I should say by way of comforting the widow. After walking up and down near the house, I ventured to enter. She was sitting clad in deep black 'weeds,' as they are called, and a few of her neighbours sat with her. On the table were decanters of port and sherry, and a bottle of whisky. Tea is regarded as effeminate on such occasions. I shook hands, and a place was made for me in accordance with my rank as curate. I was expressing my sympathy, but as soon as she could get a word in she said, 'Wasn't it a grand procession? There hasn't been such a funeral in this street before,'—a statement in which her neighbours present supported her with sundry marks of assent. She then without pride proceeded to inform me how many 'spice loaves' and bottles of best port and sherry had been disposed of. I could have

added a goodly number of whisky also, but it would not have done to have mentioned this. It is not genteel to talk of whisky drinking in the presence of ladies. Port wine and sherry are always ostentatiously displayed to the gaze, but the great drink is something stronger.

The chief personage at a funeral is the 'corpse.' After that each one's importance is in proportion to his relationship to the deceased, who drop their proper names on this occasion, and are known and referred to as the corpse's mother, or the corpse's brother.

'Will you just come and see the corpse's wife, sir?' said a breathless man who had run all the way from the house to where I lived. 'She refuses to let the corpse come away,' added the undertaker in an injured tone. I promised to come as he wished. On my arrival, the undertaker was at the door. 'Glad you've come, sir. The corpse's mother is a-howling, and instead of bein' a help she is an 'indrance.' A few words from me, and the corpse was allowed to go, though

in a desperate effort to get at the undertaker the mother fell headlong downstairs, but she attended the burial apparently none the worse for her shaking.

The parish—I was at the mother church—had a large population, and sometimes we had as many as fourteen and fifteen burials in one day. The arrangement was that each curate got his turn once in six weeks. That meant a week at the cemetery. Often I have been burying people from ten o'clock until six. In winter the duty was rough—often up to the knees in snow. Only men of strong physique could stand it. Think of it, you who talk of a clergyman's lazy life. The time will come when every bishop will have to insist upon a strict medical examination, as in the army, before a man is admitted to Holy Orders. One winter's afternoon I had waited and waited for a funeral which was three hours and a half late. About six-thirty, one of the grave diggers looked into the office. 'The corpse is coming, sir,' he said, and I went out. The hearse was approaching the

cemetery gates, and the procession in straggling order extended about a quarter of a mile behind. Of course there were big gaps. The hearse stopped every now and then, and the chief undertaker put his fingers to his mouth and whistled up the stragglers, most of whom were drunk. When they got to the gates he came up and apologised for the delay. 'It was the fault of the corpse's friends. I never knew a corpse with so many relations,' he said, in a hurt sort of tone. 'The worst of relatives is, they *will* interfere,' he went on. 'I gives a horder—at once a relative gives another horder. I think I'll just go and whistle them up,' he broke off suddenly; and the next moment, with his hat bands flying in the wind and his fingers to his mouth, he was blowing a shrill whistle; but he had repeated this signal so often that it had lost its effect upon the loiterers. However, we got them up, and the service proceeded.

It is difficult at times to refrain from laughing. Once I was sorely tried. A funeral arrived at the gate; the proper order of following

was arranged, and then the undertaker stepped up to the hearse, opened the door, looked, shut the door and opened it again. Then he scratched his head, and the expression on his face defied description. Stepping up to me, 'Sir, I am very sorry, but we have come without the corpse!' he gasped, and the poor man perspired in agony at the carelessness for which, of course, he was to blame. There was nothing for it but to go back, and the burial took place next day. The fact was, in the effort to get the people to leave the house and the drink, they had omitted to fetch out the coffin. The undertaker fell from his proud position like a falling rocket. He mounted the box beside the driver of the hearse with a woebegone expression, and the larger portion of those who followed on foot adjourned to the nearest public-house, telling the undertaker they would wait there while he fetched the corpse. Probably someone will say this is all very sad. So it is, but my wish is to represent facts as they are. It may comfort some who read

this to know that things are better than they were.

Not many years ago a funeral would have been considered a most disappointing affair unless there was a free fight afterwards—a kind of Donnybrook Fair, with a consequent appearance of the ringleaders before the magistrates in the morning. This is not unknown now, but it is the exception. What I have mentioned in regard to the eating and drinking is the rule. These are poor people; where does the money come from? A natural question. Insurance funds. Every man is in a burial fund, and the same man may be in two or three; what is more, his wife and children are likewise insured, so that often there are twenty and even forty pounds spent over a funeral. Open house is kept. Everyone is welcome to a drink and a cut at the cake. If he likes, he can take a whole cake. A number of people make a living out of attending funerals.

'Do you know Mr Blank, sir?' asked an undertaker one day in a large way of business. He was giving me a lift in his

cab. Mr Blank, I might say, was a rich man who lived just outside the town in a large, charming place of his own.

'He's an 'ard man,' continued my friend. 'I buried his wife last February. The weather was bitter. He 'ad six mutes.' I may say, for the information of those who are not acquainted with this profession, that the mutes are the men who stand outside the door of the house when anyone is dead. They are considered a great luxury.

'Well,' went on my companion, 'it was freezing so hard that I begged a little whisky for them. What do you think Mr Blank said, sir? Why, let them jump about a bit!' The spectacle of mutes in all their hideous trappings jumping about was too much. I roared with laughter, but not so much as a smile dawned on the face of my informant, who waited until I was done, when he remarked quietly, 'But it was 'ard, sir, all the same.' And I agreed with him.

I remember once I was reading the service for the dead. It was winter time. The wind

howled, and darkness had just set in. I might say the cemetery was supposed to close at five, but it rarely did. By the aid of a candle, which spluttered and gutted with the draught, I read on. The mourners had settled down to sleep, and nothing was heard but the wind and the sleet as it was lashed against the windows. Suddenly a lull came, and the silence was broken by a groan from the coffin. The women shrieked, some fainted, and the faces of the men paled. 'Silence!' I called, and in the hush which followed the same groan came from the coffin. The men looked to me. There was only one thing to be done. In a very short time we had the lid off, but the person inside was dead, and had not moved—so the undertaker said. To satisfy the people, although I was quite sure that the groan did not come from the deceased, I directed that the coffin should remain all night in the chapel. A doctor was brought. He explained to me afterwards that the groan did possibly come from the coffin; that dead bodies have been known to emit curious groans. Possibly it might have been the wood

expanding or contracting with the heat. This would happen if the wood were new of which the coffin was made, especially if it stood in a hot room.

A very awkward thing took place at another funeral in this same burial ground. In the chapel and at the grave side a woman who had been drinking became hysterical. She behaved so badly that the service was frequently interrupted by her vehement shouts. At the grave she announced her intention of being buried with the 'corpse,' and made one or two lunges as if to throw herself into the grave, but she was restrained by those who stood near. My own belief was that a great deal of it was acting. However, she gave another plunge forward, and in she went head first. The ground was frozen hard, and a slight shower of sleet and rain had made it like glass; what is more, the earth thrown out sloped towards the grave. We did succeed in getting her out, but I won't describe the process. She was quite sobered, and I think the fright did her good. Will you believe it, she was no relation to the deceased, and had not

even received an invitation to the funeral. The relatives were very indignant with the 'hussy,' as they called her, and she went off at a quick trot. Half a dozen men, relatives of the corpse, had their new blacks spoilt, and one man's silk hat dropped into the grave and was buried, I suppose, for he went home without it.

CHAPTER VII

MISSION WORK UNDER DIFFICULTIES

EAGER for work, and confident that I was able to revolutionise the parish by my preaching powers, I determined to open out active mission work in the model lodging-houses. I talked the matter over with the Vicar, as a dutiful curate should do, and it did not discourage me when I found that he was not very enthusiastic about my proposed venture. He mentioned various attempts that had been made before. However, I only wanted his permission, and that was readily granted. In a large slum parish as this was, the model lodging-houses were quite an institution; though why called 'model,' unless by way of sarcasm, I never could quite make out. There, of course, congregated—herded,

one might say—the drifting population of vagrants and beggars, thieves and shady working men on the look-out for a job. All ages. Both sexes. Men, women, and children who knew more of the hardships of life than the pleasures. Speaking of the occupants as a whole, one might say that if they were not criminals, they lived on the frontier of that class. The price charged was fourpence per night, and this included the privilege of cooking their meals and the use of a gridiron or frying pan. After my interview with the Vicar, I went to the landlord of the biggest of the lodging-houses and explained to him what I was going to do.

'Of course I could stop yer if I liked,' was his response, when I had told him my plans.

'No, you could not,' I said firmly.

'Yes, I can, 'cos the place belongs to me,' he replied hotly.

'Then I will pay my fourpence and take lodgings for the night,' was my rejoinder. This proved a trump card.

'Well, look here. I don't like this 'yer job,

but I believes you means well. My advice is, keep out. If you are determined to come, why, all I have to say is, come.'

'Very well, I will come in this evening. What do you think would be the best time?'

'About eight, or from that to nine. They are quietest then, because most of their mouths are full.'

'In what way?' I asked. I did not quite grasp the allusion.

'Grub,' he responded, and further explained by adding, 'Vittels.'

There seemed something in that remark of his, and I thanked him for his good advice.

'Not so good as the other,' he grunted.

'What do you mean?'

'Why, keep away, of course. That is the best advice,' and the man grinned.

That same night I walked down to the place. There was a curious leer on the face of the landlord as I passed him in the entrance. The room was about fifty feet long. Originally there had been two rooms, and these were knocked into one. Around a huge fireplace,

with its six-feet bars, was a group of dirty men, women and children, each engaged in cooking. Some were frying sausages, others tripe and onions. There was, too, the pungent odour which spoke strongly of bloaters. Round plain deal tables were a number eating their supper, while others waited for a turn at the fire, and kept up a running chaff with those in possession. A few with pinched and hungry faces looked with longing eyes at their more fortunate companions. One woman, who must have been handsome once, rested her elbows on the table, and, unconscious of the turmoil around her, seemed to be far away in a brown study. Coarse jests, brutal oaths, snatches of low songs; add to this a horrible smell of unwashed men and women and cooking, and you have the interior of this 'model' lodging-house.

I went to one end of the room, which commanded a full view of everyone. 'Do not let me interfere with what any of you are doing,' I began.

'We'll take —— good care of that,' shouted a rough-looking man who was busy rubbing some

potatoes with his coat sleeve. This was the signal for a general laugh.

'Stow that, and keep your breath to cool your porridge, or, by the Lord that made me, I'll close your mouth once and for all,' called out a copper-faced man—a sailor, I fancy.

This was a diversion in my favour, and helped me considerably.

'I have come to you—' I began again.

'Why?' 'Who asked you?' 'Does your mammie know?' were some of the ejaculations, accompanied with loud laughter.

'Because you don't come to hear me,' I went on. 'I want to induce some of you to come to the church—'

But I got no further. A disturbance had commenced, and everyone turned to listen to an animated conversation between a man at the fire and another at the table, and, in spite of their respective positions, the latter appeared to be the warmer of the two.

'He's a Protestant, I tell yer,' shouted the man at the fire.

'It's a —— lie; he's a Catholic,' vociferated the other.

'You be ——. I tell you he's a Protestant.'

And in order to add extra emphasis to his remark he hurled a bloater which belonged to someone else. This missile, hot from the gridiron, struck his opponent full in the face. In less than five seconds the whole of the individuals in the room were locked together in deadly combat. Men and women, in less time than it takes me to tell it, were struggling in a hopeless mixture of arms, legs and heads on the sanded floor. The cooking utensils were freely used. Hair was torn out, noses were bleeding, clothing torn to shreds. I stood and gazed at the struggling, shrieking, biting, swearing mass until the landlord came up to me and recalled my wandering thoughts.

'I knew how it would be,' he said. 'You had better go; you can do no good by remaining.'

He spoke kindly enough—more in sorrow than in anger. Perhaps he saw that my heart was heavy at the result of what I meant to be a

message of 'Peace.' I remember the woman who sat with her elbows on the table—she and an old man alone refrained from joining in the scrimmage—watched me as I left with her large, thoughtful eyes, and I fancied that she wished to thank me. Even this was something—a little light in the dark places.

Next day I called upon the landlord again, and suggested another visit. He shook his head.

'Where's my profit to come in if we are to have that shindy each night? Do you know what last night's row cost?'

'In what way?' I asked.

'Why, in pots and pans, to be sure. I reckon five shillings would not cover it. Come upstairs and see the damage.'

I went in. Sure enough five shillings was a moderate estimate. I took out my purse and gave him two half-crowns.

'No, governor,' he remarked quietly. 'I believe you mean well, and I don't want your money for it; but it's not all beer and skittles keeping a shop of this kind.' A compromise

was effected. He paid half, and therefore handed me back the half-crown. 'Are we quits now?' he said.

'I am quite satisfied, and I thank you.'

'Then take this other half-crown as a subscription to your class for the matchbox girls.' It was a kind act. He was rough, very rough, and never entered any place of worship, but there was a soft place in his heart.

He continued smoking for a time, evidently cogitating over something, so I waited.

'Now, look here,' he broke out presently, 'come again to-night before we get so many in. Perhaps you may do something with the women and children; but I should advise you to clear out when the others come.' So I found myself trying again. There were about fifteen or sixteen women and children, and I volunteered to sing to them and give a short address. They looked at me suspiciously, but they were not unwilling, and most of them listened. Just in the middle of my address a man came in with his pockets bulging out on each side. These he leisurely began to empty on one of the

tables. It was a strange mixture. Sandwiches, remains of pie, jam tarts, a cold, stiff-looking mutton chop coated with hard grease, cold potatoes and sausages, etc., etc. Hungry eyes were cast at this, and I found that the fleshpots of Egypt received more attention than my address, so I brought it to a close. The beggar, when he cleaned out his huge pockets, sat down and seemed interested in what I was saying. He was a lordly individual, the owner of these broken meats, and with a lordly air he beckoned me to him.

He put one or two questions to me. All the while an admiring, flattering crowd of women and children stood round him, crushing each other in order to be near. The lordly one seemed quite satisfied with my answers, to the relief of those who stood near. 'With the gesture of a prince' he pointed to the scraps on the table, at the sight of which I felt ill. 'Take your pick,' he said, and with an air of great condescension he waved me towards the heap. Here I was in a fix. Offend him, and I was undone. Eat a par-

ticle of what his begging had procured! Pah! the thought made me ill. All eyes were on me, and I looked round. Then I took refuge in deceit. 'I give my portion to that poor woman there,' I said dramatically, and I pointed to an old creature, thin and tottering. Never shall I forget the sensation caused by my self-sacrifice. From that time my reputation was secure. The story was handed on. From henceforth I came and went, and preached and sang. No one dared to object or use a wrong word. 'I was the man who had given my share of spoil to a poor old woman.' What a hypocrite I felt myself to be. Was St Paul conscious of something like this when he spoke of becoming all things to all men that he might thereby further his Master's cause?

One evening I was in this same lodging-house. I gave out a hymn, but as I was the only one who apparently knew the tune, it was sung by me alone. A man entered, paused, then he put his hand in his pocket and threw me a halfpenny!

A colleague said to me one night, 'By-the-

bye, I baptised a baby in that model lodging-house of yours. Here it is; you might enter it for me,' and he passed me a piece of paper. 'Why, I baptised this child yesterday,' I replied. That was not all. We found that the child had been baptised by four clergy of the Church of England, one Roman Catholic priest, and one dissenting minister! The infant was a source of revenue to its parents. It was a delicate child, and of course each one gave a shilling or half-crown to the mother, pleased at her concern for her offspring's spiritual welfare.

I often sat and chatted with some of the men who resorted to this place. Many of them knew every county thoroughly. There is, too, a regular system of freemasonry among the usual tramps of the road by which they can communicate by means of signs. If one comes across what is termed a good house, where the people will assist if applied to, he makes a mark ◇ on the gate or somewhere. Perhaps the readers of this have noticed that sometimes they will get a succession of beg-

gars. If they examined the door-posts and gate, perhaps they would discover some sign like the one known as the Bone, a pattern of which I have given. Various hieroglyphics are used. × means, 'no use calling,' while □ is a signal of danger. This is a guide as to method, and tells that the person is of a religious turn of mind, and will only help if the suppliant goes on the 'cant' tack. Another mark on the vagabond's private list is . I would recommend all clergy to put a small one, about the size of a two shilling piece, on their parsonage gates, and they will enjoy a singular immunity from these rovers.

To join in and understand their lingo means learning almost a new language. Scarcely anything is referred to under its usual designation. 'I thought once myself of being a parson,' said one of these wanderers to me as I stood among them. 'I was a little devil for saying my prayers, and mimicking the old vicar where I lived!'

'Well, I don't mind dropping in.' This was in reply to an invitation to another to

come to a special mission service. 'A brother of mine is a parson,' he went on; 'not a *real* one, but a Salvation Army kind. He's a rare speller—rattle off any word you like to give him!' 'Who converted him?' sang out a listener to the conversation. 'He never needed no conversion.' This was said with great contempt. 'Let me tell you my father was a gentleman as what helped to build Durham Cathedral,' he added.

'Go on. That cathedral was built long afore your governor was born. Who yer telling that to?'

'You're a liar, for it isn't finished bein' built yet. He's many a time spoken to a bishop. Take off yer coat if yer don't believe me!'

This seemed to settle the matter.

CHAPTER VIII

CHURCH WORKERS AND THEIR ECCENTRICITIES

This is a big subject, and one scarcely knows where and how to begin in describing them and their achievements. Let me say at the very start that no one estimates the work of the laity more highly than I do myself. In that big wilderness of a parish from which I took my title, I do not like to think what would have happened without the magnificent help of district visitors, Sunday school teachers, church councillors, sidesmen, etc., etc., to say nothing of churchwardens. But the latter have a chapter to themselves. I would not hurt the dignity of so old established an institution by mixing up such stalwart supporters of Church and Queen with

ordinary workers. Do not for one moment imagine that I undervalue the work of district visitors because I may touch their weaknesses time after time without perhaps representing the other side of self-denial and splendid effort in the promotion of Christ's kingdom. Wherever there are big efforts, there must of necessity be big failures, and it is with the funny part of the latter that this article would deal.

'Are you married?' asked one of our injudicious visitors of a mother of six, as she sat with her bairns at tea. The reply came in the form of a pot of jam from the hand of the insulted British matron, and the visitor left without any words of adieu. It was considered advisable to find a fresh district for our lady worker after that, and I was sent to soothe the ruffled feelings of the mother of six.

Towering high above all lady workers was Miss Stocks. She was very tall, broad-shouldered and large-boned—in fact, a veritable giantess. There was just the suggestion of down upon her upper lip, which naughty

boys called a moustache. Her voice was gruff and harsh, and her mien and gait ponderous. We were all afraid of her. She was the terror of the curates. We were much more afraid of her than of the Vicar or the Bishop, but we loved her all the same. If her voice were harsh, her heart was kind, and a more devoted worker there could not be. Woe to the curate who overslept himself, and turned up late for matins. Eight o'clock — winter and summer — found Miss Stocks at church ready for her devotions before beginning the work of the day. In our districts she kept us up to our visiting. She helped the poor out of poverty. She nursed the sick. She bullied the life out of one relieving officer at least. She doctored the babies, and saw that they were accompanied by the father to Holy Baptism. Drunkards fled at her reproach, and publicans dodged behind their bars when the cry went up that Miss Stocks was near. I have seen her go into a public-house, and literally lift a man out and drag him home. There she would take every penny from him, and use it to buy food and things

for the wife and children. I was once knocked nearly head over heels by a breathless man in scanty attire, who had left his bed suddenly, and was seeking refuge when he banged into me. 'What is the matter?' I asked, as I grabbed him. 'Let me go; Miss Stocks is after me!' he shouted. Before the temperance meetings she would go round and gather in nine or ten men. During the lecture she would watch them, and at each successive point she would emphasise it by calling the attention of the men to whom she thought it particularly applied. As a doctor, the people had great faith in her. Her accompaniments were a satchel and a large iron spoon, the handle of which used to stick out of the hand-bag. Whoever was ill, whatever their sex, age or complaint was, the spoon was brought into use, and, with some fearsome compound, was thrust into the patient's mouth. I have known my brother clergy forswear themselves repeatedly rather than admit they were ill, all for fear of that spoon. Terrible stories were told of one curate whom she had nursed through a long illness—the tales were exag-

gerated, no doubt, but what matter. There could be no evil intent in the exaggeration, for we were all fond of her, in spite of her eccentricities and the dreadful spoon. On Sundays it had another use. Miss Stocks was the superintendent of the boys' school in a mission district. There the spoon was in constant use, and a succession of smat! smat! could be heard as she rapped the heads of the unruly ones. Once this utensil spoilt an address of mine. I was preaching in a mission church, and we were annoyed by a boy who kept opening the door and shouting 'Baa! baa!' Miss Stocks stole up quietly behind the door and waited. I can see the grim look on her face now. Presently the playful boy opened the door, inserted his head, and—the spoon descended with terrific deadly aim on the boy's pate. He did not withdraw his head; he followed it in, and fell on the floor! and for the remainder of the service he sat bolt upright on a form, under the watchful eye of Miss Stocks. The incident was too funny. I could not go on. I longed to break out into a roar.

A solemn thing indeed it was when Miss Stocks took prayers in the Sunday school. Attention was called by Miss Stocks rapping on the desk with her spoon. There was always perfect order immediately. Once, and only once, did I offer to take the prayers myself for her. I never went through a more painful ordeal. She walked about in creaky boots, answering the responses, and rapping the heads of the children who opened even one eye to have a look at the new curate. What went on was something like this. I would be speaking to the children, and every other sentence would be interrupted with the smack ! smack ! of this spoon along the heads of the disobedient ones—and so on. Yet I never heard a single complaint from the parents. A colleague of mine said, 'They know better.' It did not strike me in that way at the time, but in all probability he was right.

In our district was a man, a paid agitator, who lived by 'spouting,' as his fellows termed it. He was one of these men who cry down with everything. He was a

greedy vagabond, who demanded beefsteaks for his breakfast while his children went barefooted and barelegged. Once he was addressing a meeting of working men in Station Square, a favourite rendezvous for loafers. Miss Stocks walked straight through the crowd, lifted him from his chair—he was a small man — and shook him, as a terrier shakes a rat, and the men stood round and laughed. Soon afterwards the demagogue shifted his quarters to another part of the town. His life was too wretched under such conditions which allowed a woman to cuff him. Miss Stocks was a great trial to the choir-master, for she sang loudly, and when she got a tune she knew well, she led the choir 'clean off its feet,' as one of the men expressed it.

'You must congratulate me,' said one of the churchwardens, a fussy man, to her one day in the vestry, as he warmed himself at the fire.

'What for?' asked Miss Stocks sharply.

'I have just been made a J.P.'

'They must be hard up for magistrates when they make you one. It may be a matter of congratulation to you, but it is not to the town or to those who chose you—of that I am quite sure.'

'Now, now,' said the poor man, 'that is *rather* hard, eh, Miss Stocks?'

'She does take the starch out of a fellow,' he said to me afterwards. 'Fancy, now, saying a thing like that! Some men would be offended.'

At vestry meetings Miss Stocks was always *en evidence*, accompanied by the iron spoon, with which she emphasised her remarks, or called the attention of the chair. Men who contradicted her always kept out of range of this article, I noticed.

One district visitor was a great nuisance to us curates. She was for ever calling to consult us about trivial matters, and we used to avoid her as much as possible. Miss Stocks treated her with silent disdain. I had my own opinion that she was mad. She had a terrible row with one of my colleagues, and she complained to the Vicar of the old parish church. He sympathised

with her, and wrote what I considered an impertinent letter to my brother cleric, who for the sake of peace said nothing more. In less than three months after this incident, the congregation of the parish church were startled by a lady rushing up into the pulpit and throwing her arms round the neck of the sympathetic Vicar, and they were further shocked by hearing her shout, 'You walk home with Miss ——. Why don't you walk home with me?' It took the united efforts of four churchwardens to remove her.

Another lady worker went mad in our parish, and her insanity showed itself in a very peculiar way. It was some time, too, before we found out that her mind was off its balance. Evidently at some period of her life she must have been a clever painter and naturalist. Caterpillars, beetles, flies, bugs, were found painted on books, surplices, boxes, etc., etc.; in fact, everything which offered space was immediately seized upon and painted with a crowd of ants, flies, snails, etc., etc. I never saw insects painted so cleverly. Once she sketched a number of very

objectionable insects on a collar which I had taken off in the vestry and had left on the table while I had a wash. The climax came when she painted a small hand-bag belonging to the Bishop. The scenes depicted were startling, and Miss —— had to go. After she was gone there was a great demand for mementos of her skill, and some specimens brought high prices. The lid of a mustard tin, ornamented with slugs and caterpillars, was sold for thirty shillings. I heard that she was the daughter of a celebrated R.A., who gave up his lucrative profession through religious mania.

'Please give bearer a ticket for half a pound of four shilling tea.—Sincerely yours,

'Rose Medows.'

This was a note from one of our district visitors brought to me by a poor woman. I gave the order for tea, but not the four shilling brand. When I spoke to her about it she said, 'Oh, can you get it for less?' Her history was not a happy one. She was brought up as,

alas! many girls are, to pride herself on her ignorance of domestic matters and household duties. She married a curate who had a hundred and forty pounds a year, and is never likely to have more. The result—a dirty house, unruly children, and herself a drab. Why will mothers not bring up their daughters sensibly? Playing the piano or the banjo is not everything, and a man soon gets tired of it. There can be no harm in being domesticated. Suppose a girl does marry a prince or a duke, or a very rich man, she will make the better wife for knowing something of household duties, and be better fitted to look after her numerous servants.

CHAPTER IX

CONCERNING CHURCHWARDENS AND VESTRY MEETINGS

The very word churchwarden tells its own tale, and carries within it its own history. It is an office typical of the English and the English character. See him as he whispers to his colleague as they stand at the west end of the church. Little do the ordinary laity grasp the weighty cares and responsibility of these custodians of their rights and privileges. Why is it that churchwardens always will stand? As a rule there is a pew set apart for them, but they don't occupy it. At times, as a great favour, a friend is allowed

to sit there, and is shown in with great solemnity; and often the churchwarden will so far unbend as to sit for perhaps a minute with them, but no longer. He must be up and doing. 'You know I never know what these curates will be up to next. But what I say is, we must stick to the old ship—Church and State—that's it.' With this dubious speech a friend of my own was once greeted by a churchwarden when he remarked upon their many duties, which apparently left no time for them to show strangers to a seat. He was a very ignorant friend, and his presumption in addressing such an official showed it. What were the sidesmen doing? They are the proper people for this. A churchwarden has to stand at the west end and keep his eye upon everything. No one—but a churchwarden—must address him. The Vicar must not go down there to speak to him, but request the pleasure of his company in the clergy vestry. Then he will walk up the middle aisle not quickly, not slowly, but just as a church-

warden walks, just as hundreds of churchwardens have walked up the same aisle, scores of whom now rest beneath the shadows of the church they loved so well. It is an ancient, honourable office, and its dignity is well maintained. 'Yes; but look at the row they make at vestry meetings,' I fancy I hear someone remark. A row at vestry meetings? Certainly. It is their right and privilege. Churchwardens have their traditions to keep up just as much as the Brethren of the Trinity House or the Merchant Tailors. Why, they are but of yesterday compared with the institution of wardens. You might as well try to conceive of commemoration without the students, or plum pudding without the brandy sauce, as a vestry meeting without a row. Only once in my experience have I been at a vestry meeting which failed in its traditional customs. No inkstands were thrown about, no objections raised, everything calm and quiet. It was the dullest, flattest, stupidest meeting I was ever at. Not even an aggrieved parishioner. The

thirteen reporters were simply white with disappointment and anger. The one on the staff of the *Weekly Fabricator* seemed to blame me for it. He was expressing himself in terms not respectful to the meeting. 'This is a nice show to stay at home to report.' It was Easter Monday. The churchwardens and myself sprang up together as if one patent spring had moved the three. 'Sir, I call you to order; you must not make remarks *sotto voce*.' For a moment it seemed that old times were about to come again. The vestry meetings were generally reported in six columns, in which were to be found all speeches made, and a greater number that were intended to be made, but weren't. Yes; this meeting of the vestry was a downright failure. Even the organ-blower resented it. An Irishman who had for the previous six months canvassed the parish and his friends to support him in some policy to be revealed in the future, was quiet. 'Flat!' said my churchwarden to me. '*Very*,' remarked the

people's representative. Then I arose. I said things could not be allowed to go on in this way at future meetings. We must have an aggrieved parishioner, and I hoped all true friends of the Church would during the coming year look out one or two. Someone shouted out that there was a society in London which supplied them. I called the attention of my churchwardens to this, and they made a note of it. But the meeting was a failure. When the *Weekly Fabricator* came out, there was the sensational heading—

SCENE AT A VESTRY MEETING.

OUR REPRESENTATIVE REFUSES TO BE SAT UPON.

GREAT EXCITEMENT IN THE TOWN.

But there were only three columns, and the world still placidly revolved on its axis.

There is Mr Bebee, the parishioners' warden, always elected unanimously. For fifty years, ever since he came to the town, he has borne a name synonymous with uprightness

and integrity. Woe betide prince or peasant, bishop or curate, who tries to take liberties with him. The parishioners growl, but they trust him. A mistake of threepence in the accounts would be regarded by him as nothing less than a calamity. Then there is his colleague, Mr Binns—the very embodiment of long generations of churchwardens. A frank open face, and a courteous manner. When he speaks, which is seldom, it is to the point. A lady once remarked of him, 'There is something to look at.' I hope some day to be able to afford a good picture, and the subject shall be the two churchwardens in their normal attitude at the west end of the church.

Then the daring of these churchwardens! Why, we curates used to stand aghast. You see one of these embodiments of law and order with his face apparently glued to that of some stylish lady of the congregation. Well, he is whispering to her. Anyone else but a churchwarden doing such a thing would create a dreadful row, but no one thinks anything of it. All the churchwardens have done that in the

same way from generation to generation—and we are a conservative people. A man wished to be very funny once at a vestry meeting. The Vicar asked for nominations to the ancient and honourable office. The funny man said he saw no reason to nominate anyone, seeing that the sidesmen did all the real hard work. For a moment there was a pause—the calm before the bursting of the storm. 'Sir!' thundered the Vicar's warden, and he looked the forward young man up and down. His eyes had not far to roam. 'What do you know about such matters? Have you ever been a churchwarden? Have you ever been even a sidesman? Do you think, if you live to be as old as Methuselah, you will ever be invited to be one?' Such a run of personal, pointed questions was thrust upon the young man that he quailed in terror. After demolishing him, the warden proceeded to enlarge on the duties of his office. He referred to the sidesmen—the future churchwardens of England. (Hear! hear!) It was the wish of his colleague and himself to fit them for that office. (Hear! hear!) Therefore they

must be made self-reliant; and what better method could there be than giving them a fair share of the work? A man, he knew not his name, had ventured to suggest that the churchwardens were lazy. (No! no! and Hear! hear!) Well, at least he had inferred that. (Applause.) Strange that the sidesmen who were present should ignore the speaker's remarks. Was it because they were beneath contempt? (Hear! hear!) He would call upon them, the sidesmen, to repudiate the slanderous insinuations, and if the young man did not see his way to immediately apologise, then he would leave him to the judgment of that meeting of intelligent Englishmen and posterity.

The young man at once got up to explain. 'Apology! Apologise!' shouted the meeting; and he did. There was a special edition of the *Weekly Fabricator*, in which appeared a speech of one column from the young man. He spoke about half a dozen words, as a matter of fact. Sensational heading—

Young England at the Vestry Meeting.

Exciting Scenes.

Mr Pipkins goes for the Churchwardens.

I might add that Mr Pipkins was the young man who tried to be funny and failed, and brought a hornet's nest about his head. In the report he appeared as a veritable Demosthenes, pounding the churchwardens and literally flaying them.

When I was a curate in Nunchester, we had a churchwarden whom we shall name Smith. On second thoughts I will change this. There are so many Smiths occupying the leading positions in the country that evil-disposed persons may attempt to identify and blame the wrong man. So we will call the one in question Faber. At a vestry meeting once he proposed that the time of evensong be shifted from six-thirty to six o'clock. His brother churchwardens—we had four at this church—sat silent. Their

brother had committed a breach of etiquette. He had not first consulted them. As no one else seemed inclined to support this suggestion, the Vicar was about to pass on to the next business. 'Beg pardin, Mr Chairman, but you haven't put my motion to the meeting.'

'No,' replied that worthy gentleman; 'no one seconded it, so it falls to the ground.'

'Does it?' remarked the proposer; 'why, then, rather than that I'll second it *my*self.'

Great tact is necessary in order to keep speakers to the point. I once presided at a vestry meeting which lasted four hours. At the end someone started a conversation by remarking that he considered the local autumn race meeting had been a failure. Immediately he was assailed right and left, and before I knew where I was we were in the midst of an excited discussion. 'Really, gentlemen, I cannot allow this at a meeting of this character. You must leave the vestry;' and I insisted kindly but firmly on the room being cleared. This is how the matter struck the mind of the editor of the *Fabricator*—

EXTRAORDINARY CONDUCT OF THE VICAR.

GAGS THE MEETING.

CLEARS THE ROOM BY FORCE.

UPROARIOUS SCENES.

The most amusing part was a letter from my Bishop telling me that he had read with pain the account of my procedure at my vestry. He reminded me that such tyrannical ruling alienated the laity and brought disestablishment one step nearer! I laid the remarkable letter before my churchwardens. 'Well, sir,' responded one, 'we attack you in open vestry fair and square, but we are not going to allow the Bishop, or Archbishop for that matter, to write that way to the Vicar of this parish; it is an insult to *us*.' They requested an interview, and the Bishop caught it.

Churchwardens are great favourites with the gentle sex. A lady worker once fell violently in love with the senior warden, a widower, but he ignored her advances. She wrote letters; he returned them unopened.

Then she hit upon another scheme. She wrote her love effusions and placed them on his collecting plate. She is quite confident that she will win his heart some day.

Then see what important men they are at weddings. I mean grand ones. It rests with them whether you get a seat 'where you can see' or not. The bridegroom and best man are but shadows in comparison with these guardians.

What would happen to curates if there were no churchwardens? I don't like to think of the answer. The Vicar cannot always have his eyes upon them. 'They would burn candles and gas from sunrise to sunrise if I didn't look after them,' said a warden to me one day. 'I'm a liberal-minded man. I don't object to candles, but where's the money to come from? If we had funds in hand, why, have services all day and all night, it's not my business, and I never saw a service yet which would not do a man good if he attended in the right spirit; but things have to be *paid* for, and these young curates never think of money.'

A pleasing sight is a churchwarden's face

when someone drops a sovereign or a half-sovereign into the plate. He beams on everyone and everybody. Even a junior curate can approach him without any fear. He becomes quite playful, and condescends to joke with the sidesmen and chaff the Vicar. He puts his stove-pipe hat on the back of his head, and goes round the church examining the spouts, and talks mysteriously about 'new things' required. He consults with his colleague until two o'clock, and arrives home very late for lunch. In the afternoon he walks down to the children's service just to have another look at the gold in the safe, changes his mind about repainting the spouts, and thinks a new safe is a necessity. One Sunday morning a stranger placed a five-pound note in the offertory. About half-past two the churchwarden's wife came to see whether I knew where her husband was. The two of them were still at the church talking over things. What time they separated that night I don't know. One had supper with the other, and rumour says— No. This is not the place for rumour.

All honour to the institution. Churchwardens, why, to interfere with them would mean revolution. It would mean hacking at the vitals of the nation. They are bound up with the Fatherland. I should like to get them all together in some vast building and get the German Emperor to write out a speech for me, and propose their very good health, and the vicars and curates would come in their thousands to drink to the toast. Of its greatest benefactors the world knows the least. We have struggled through the centuries for our liberties. The barons staked a great deal when they brought the King to his senses at Runnimede. Simon de Montfort, Archbishop Langton, risked their all for posterity. But what about the ever constant struggles of the churchwardens? When their history comes to be written, we shall be still prouder of the name Englishman; for dogged pluck and endurance they are unequalled. Some day a clever writer will do them justice, but a curate mustn't be their historian.

CHAPTER X

NEW CURATES AND THEIR FAULTS

It was soon after I was ordained that I made the acquaintance of the Rev., or as he was then, Mr Freeman. There was a vacancy in the parish for another curate, and he came to see about getting the title which my Vicar was prepared to give. I was invited to breakfast and to give my opinion of the newcomer who desired to join our staff. A more nervous man I never met in all my life, and this nervousness of his led to results which were, for the whole time he was with us, a constant source of amusement. At breakfast I passed the eggs to him. At first he had evidently resolved to eat nothing, at least one would have gathered such from his refusal of everything of which he was invited to

partake. I literally thrust upon his plate an egg, which unfortunately was not over fresh, and a disagreeable odour arose as he broke the shell. 'Please do not eat it,' shouted the Vicar, as the young man was about to spoon it to his mouth ; and he motioned to a servant to remove the obnoxious article. 'Oh, it's no matter,' and poor Freeman coloured. 'I always eat them this way—I—I like them so!' However, I forcibly passed it over to the side-table, and it was carried from the room. Shortly after this he was ordained, and then the fun commenced, and continued as long as he was with us. Many stories were told of him which I cannot believe to be true, but those I quote I have every reason to think are facts.

One afternoon he had to go and see the Bishop, in company with a colleague. As they were about to leave, the rain came down in torrents, and no umbrella could face the gale of wind that was blowing. 'You cannot go home in such a tempest as this,' said his lordship, looking out at the weather. 'You must stay and have dinner with us.' 'Oh, things

are not quite so desperate as that, my lord,' was the hasty reply of my friend of the eggs episode. The Bishop laughed heartily, and often told the story. 'My dinners must be pretty bad when a drenching is preferable,' was the episcopal comment. Somehow he had the unaccountable knack of putting his foot into it. 'Will you please excuse my singing to-night?' said a young lady to him at one of our Monday evening popular concerts. 'Oh, with the greatest of pleasure,' was the response; and as the singer in question was a lady of position and means, she rather resented what she considered an uncalled-for remark. No one could help liking him; apart from his nervousness, he was an excellent parish priest and a devoted worker. He was a man, too, of fair private means, and he spent his whole income on the poor. He and I were dining with some friends one evening on the occasion of the eldest son's coming of age. In the drawing-room afterwards I saw he was watching the door like a man looking for a chance to escape. Suddenly those present were ap-

palled by hearing him say to the hostess, 'Kindly allow me the pleasure of bidding you good-night!' I felt inclined to throw something at his head for this, as I was really enjoying the evening thoroughly, and had to go with him. 'My dear chap,' he remonstrated with me as I let fly at him, 'if you knew the awful funk I was in, you would have had me out an hour ago!' The greatest trial to him was the baptismal service. He began to perspire as soon as he learnt that there was a child to be baptised. 'What on earth is your objection?' I said to him one day when he begged me to christen two little girls. 'I'm so afraid of the clothes slipping through the child,' he gasped. Once, at a dinner to church workers, he was asked to give the toast, 'The Ladies.' I am sure he never had anything to eat. The whole time he sat making notes, with this result—'I have been asked to propose a toast which I would much rather not do—I mean I wish that I knew something nice to say of them—by that, of

course, I mean I wish there had been some nicer ladies present—I mean to say some cleverer man present—' Here he was interrupted by the laughter which broke out. 'Call for someone to sing "For they are jolly good fellows,"' suggested a mischievous colleague by his side. 'I will conclude by asking you one and all to join me in singing, "For they are jolly good fellows!"' broke in our junior. On another occasion several of us were at the palace to an afternoon tea. The Bishop's wife was entertaining us in the drawing-room, but it was some time before her husband arrived, and when he did, he explained that he had been detained by one of his archdeacons, and apologised for his late arrival. 'Oh, you cannot come too late!' replied our worthy young friend. We all laughed, and Mrs Bishop passed it off by remarking that she regarded it as a compliment to her power of conversation. But Freeman had not done yet. The Bishop chatted with him for some time, and things went fairly smoothly until the Bishop said,

'Do you know, while I remember it, I cannot preach at your church on Christmas Day as promised. I must be in London that week. I am sorry to disappoint you.' 'Not at all. No disappointment, quite the contrary. Glad, indeed, to hear—' What more the irrepressible young man was about to say I know not, for my senior colleague gave such a tremendous sneeze that the remainder of the remark was lost. Going home rather an amusing thing happened. 'Look here, Freeman,' said our senior man, 'you are an *ass*. Why cannot you keep quiet, instead of making your asinine remarks? I am speaking to you now as a brother—'

Here he was stopped by the peal of laughter in which he was forced to join. He was often chaffed about this slip. I must relate another story of him. He was asked to give an address once at some missionary meeting where a gallant colonel took the chair. I may add that our brother was indeed a brilliant platform speaker, and much

run after, and only by dint of very hard work did he manage to squeeze in this night off, for we were very busy at the time. The meeting commenced at eight, and was supposed to be all over by nine-thirty. The gallant chairman spoke for one hour and ten minutes! After this he had the audacity to say, 'Well, with these few remarks I will now call upon Mr Alexander, senior curate of ——, to give us his address.' Up shot Mr Alexander with a spring. 'My address is the Clergy House, Nunchester, and I am off to catch the next train;' and catching up his hat and coat, he was out of the hall before the lengthy speaker and the astonished audience had quite realised what had happened. It created rather a sensation in the neighbourhood, and the effect generally was beneficial. On another occasion he was the preacher at a mission church in one of the suburbs. Just as he was going up into the pulpit one of the churchwardens stopped him and said, 'Make your sermon as short as possible, please, and don't mention nothing about ritualistic

things.' Alexander bowed, and mounted the steps. When the hymn was done he said, 'My brethren, I will not trouble you to sit down. I have been requested by your churchwarden to make my sermon as short as possible. As he did not mention the amount of time, rather than hurt his feelings I prefer not to preach at all, so I will ask you to sing Hymn 193, and I will close the service.' That churchwarden was very angry; in the vestry afterwards he became abusive. Alexander, who was a strong, powerful fellow, took up the poker and bent it round the neck of the officious warden in such a way that he had to have it filed off afterwards. There was a row, and the matter was reported to the Bishop, who reprimanded each of the parties, and ordered the athletic curate to purchase another poker at his own expense. This was by no means the first time he had done the poker trick, as he called it. The Vicar was always buying new ones for his poorer parishioners. His senior assistant was a most

diligent visitor, and while in the cottages he often amused sick people by showing them the fantastic shapes into which he could twist this article. But he did not always succeed in making it straight again, and sometimes he left it in the form of the number 8, or the letter S or V. One day he took me into a cottage and showed me, with great pride, one he had made into the letter M. The Vicar always removed this particular fire-iron when Alexander was his visitor. Apart from this eccentricity, he was a splendid parish priest, and a general favourite, but he could never be induced to give up the poker trick. A story was current that the Bishop offered him a living on condition that he promised never to twist another poker, but he was unable to give the required pledge, and the vicarage went to his immediate junior.

I must tell one little romance. A little way out of the city lived a Mrs Twells with a family of seven grown-up daughters. The mother was generally known as the curate hunter.

She was fairly well off, very ignorant, and very pushing. The older daughters had not had the advantage of a liberal education, but the younger ones had. Often Mrs Twells would drive in in her carriage and pair and carry off three or four curates to dinner, but as a rule we fled at her approach. One of our men, named Pudsey, suddenly became a constant visitor at the house, and it was generally understood that he was engaged to one of the girls. We heard the report with sorrow, but we never talked of it, and Pudsey kept his own counsel. Things went on in this way for about six months, when the explosion came. We were chatting round the fire one night when the door opened, and Pudsey, with a white face which betokened some catastrophe, called me out. 'I am in a difficulty, old chap, and you must help me,' he said. Standing outside was a lady closely muffled up in a shawl, and I guessed she had to do with the difficulty. 'This is Miss Dillon,' he remarked, seeing the questioning look on my

face. 'She has been turned out of the house by that woman Mrs Twells.' 'Oh, the governess!' I ejaculated. 'Yes; I will give all explanations afterwards, but I want your help now. Just put on your hat and come with us; we will walk slowly up the street.' In a few seconds I was after them. 'Do you think your aunt would take her in for the night, until we see what can be done, old chap?' 'Certainly,' I replied. 'I will take her there at once.' On the way he told me the whole story. After dinner he had requested an interview with his hostess, in order to tell her that Miss Dillon had accepted him as her future husband. At this announcement Mrs Twells became furious with rage and disappointment, and immediately ordered Pudsey and the lady of his choice out of the house. Fortunately my aunt had not gone to bed, and she gave Miss Dillon a motherly welcome. Shortly afterwards they were married. Mrs Twells ruined herself socially, and her doctors recommended her a trip abroad. It was a

long time before she dared to show her face in Nunchester. Everyone smiled, and the penniless governess and Pudsey were overwhelmed with wedding presents. North country people when they do take a thing up, carry it out with vigour. To crown all, the member interested himself on behalf of Pudsey, and during the honeymoon the offer of a living was made and accepted, and the handsome cheques received furnished their vicarage. Miss Dillon was an orphan, and her deceased father had been a clergyman of position and importance in the diocese, so the match gave universal satisfaction.

The Rev. Bertie Maypole was attached to an adjoining church, but for part of his time he lived with us. His weakness was patent medicines. As soon as the London papers came in, his first glance was not at the foreign news column, or those items in which all are more or less interested, but he immediately turned up the advertisements. Any new medicine on the market was a positive joy to him. Pills and bottles adorned the mantelshelf by dozens.

They were the means of giving me the greatest fright I ever had in my life. I had invited up the junior members of a lads' guild. They were the youths who sold matches and newspapers in the streets of Nunchester. During the evening we were having some games when my landlady appeared and consulted me about the coffee, which was running out. I left the room to give instructions. On returning, to my horror I found that my guests had devoured all the pills and swallowed the contents of Bertie's medicine bottles. My landlady and the servant ran for the doctor while I operated with an improvised emetic, and the time between this and the arrival of the doctor was a lively one. One boy, who admitted eating a whole box of globules of some kind, kept up a prolonged hideous howl for his mother. In a few minutes the doctor arrived. He was a sharp, clever young fellow named Gilmour. He soon grasped the situation, asked about the emetic, nodded, and began a minute examination of the dregs of the bottles and the labels of the pill boxes. 'All right! No alarm. No

harm done. Nothing to injure a baby!' I breathed freely again, but the party was spoilt by the first panic, and my young friends were dismissed. After that we made Maypole keep his quack medicines in a cupboard.

One curate we had to turn out of the house. He was a scientist, and used to experiment with chemicals in his bedroom. One day he invited a number of friends to a demonstration in the schoolroom. This was to be a preliminary to one on a larger scale. The first three experiments were admitted failures. The fourth was so far a success that a large jar was blown to pieces; and at the fifth the audience was well nigh suffocated. Fortunately a large pane of glass had been blown out of its frame by the previous disaster, which enabled the obnoxious gas to escape in part, but one lady was very sick indeed when we got her out into the schoolyard. The smells from his experiments got so bad, and our nerves so unstrung by the frequent explosions on a smaller scale, that, as I said, we forcibly ejected him. After that he changed his

rooms on an average once a fortnight, and finally the Vicar invited him to find a fresh sphere of work where he would have more time for his researches into chemistry. Some time after that he wrote and told us that his invention was a success, but what it was we never knew; we were rather afraid that he might send us one, so we did not inquire. A man who was rather a character came as *locum tenens* once when the Vicar was away. He had some complaint with a long name which I forget. During a period extending over five years he had consulted no end of doctors, and he had in a book a list of things which his medical advisers had forbidden him to eat, arranged in alphabetical order. His great joke was to ask you to suggest some article of diet which, in your consideration, he might eat with safety. For example, suppose you said fish, he immediately turned up F, and gave you the names of the doctors who had interdicted this food, and the date. He used to boast that no one could name any ordinary edible which would not

be found in the book he kept. He was once very much disgusted by a young curate, who, on being asked to name some savoury dish, recommended smoked elephant's tongue, which he assured us he had partaken of, and found very agreeable to the palate. This was not on the list; but a doctor formed one of the party, and he relieved the tension of the moment by telling our clerical friend that he must on no account eat it, or he would not be answerable for the consequences.

A curious eccentricity manifested by one curate was a habit of bursting into incontrollable peals of laughter at the most unaccountable times. He was sent to us by the Bishop, who thought that the heavy work of a town parish might possibly cure him. But, if anything, he was worse. If he were asked to read a lesson, he broke down in the middle and laughed; and if a person spoke to him, the probability was a fit of laughter would follow. Then a brilliant idea entered the head of the Archdeacon. 'Give him a week at the cemetery,' he said to the Vicar;

and I was told off to coach him in his duties, but he never succeeded in taking a service there, and at the end of the second day I sent him home. Soon after that he left us, and what became of him I never heard.

One occupant of our house I must not omit; that was Jack, the bull-terrier. He was common property, and joined the staff of his own accord as a voluntary worker. Dog stories, I am aware, are very demoralising, and I must be careful in dealing with this subject. He was not a handsome dog. A lady once remarked that his ugliness was sweet. He was a great favourite with the Sunday school children, and when he disappeared, which he did occasionally for three and four days at a time, we knew that he had received an invitation from one of the older lads in my Bible-class who took a special interest in him. We were fond of Jack, but there were people who did not understand him, and frequent were the complaints to the Vicar about the misdoings of the curates' dog. The brute had a playful kind of disobedience which was quite fascinating. Sometimes, when we had to

put in a few social calls, we would tell Jack that he was to remain at home. If he could get out he would follow us at a distance of fifty yards or so. When we stopped, he stopped. He was most patient, and would wait for hours while we took funerals or called on our friends. At times he caused me agonies of mind. I was calling at one of the swell houses in Nunchester. From the drawing-room window I could see Jack, or rather the tail of Jack, the rest of him being in a hole which he was digging in the middle of a fine tennis lawn. The reception at this house the next time I called was not a pleasant one. On another occasion he sank a small well on the grass plot in front of the Bishop's palace. A great patroness of the Church was an elderly lady whom we shall designate Lady B. The Vicar used to be a kind of chaplain to her. When he was away, the duty fell to me. A note came to me at church asking me to call after evensong. Jack was waiting outside, and, unknown to me, followed. I found the dear old lady having some hot gruel with a strong

odour of Scotch whisky about it. She took part of it, and then placed the remainder on the floor by her side to cool. At the end of a quarter of an hour or so, I rose to take my leave. To my horror, the basin was licked clean. My glance sought Jack; an instinct told me he was the culprit, and there stretched out on a bearskin he reclined, and he greeted my look of anger with a hesitating wag of his tail. Lady B. laughed heartily, and beckoned Jack to approach. Then the whole disgrace was out. Jack could not walk! There was nothing for it but carrying him home, which I had to do.

For some unaccountable reason he took a dislike to a Wesleyan minister who lived near. Why, we could never make out, but if the dog saw him pass the house, he would nearly pull the place down. One day he seized the man by his trousers, but I prevented him from doing more damage. The very next day he bit the Baptist minister, who was calling on his friend. Of course we apologised, and made every overture for peace, but the two ministers insisted

on the dog being destroyed. We offered liberal terms, but nothing save Jack's life would satisfy. Then we in turn began to take legal steps to protect ourselves; and after some further correspondence we won so far that Jack's life was spared. But we had to give him away, and he was despatched to Middlesborough, where he distinguished himself by biting a lecturer employed by the Liberation Society, and he was sent back to us. Fortunately the objecting ministers had left the town, and we felt justified in retaining Jack. His next escapade was to devour a letter which the Bishop sent to me. We succeeded in getting sufficient out of his mouth to perceive who our correspondent was. I immediately wrote, and of course laid the blame on the dog. The Bishop wrote back a nice letter, and asked whether the animal was licensed. I wrote back and informed him that the dog had received his license but three days previous, and begged the Bishop not to cancel it. His reply was very witty. Seeing that it was Jack's first

offense, his lordship would not cancel his licence, but if it occurred again the culprit would be *suspended*. He added that Jack was to be informed of his decision. Encouraged by this, we reported the case to the Archdeacon, and asked whether the Bishop would be warranted in suspending the animal. The venerable gentleman replied by saying that as it was evidently a dogmatic question, an appeal lay to the Archbishop. So the joke went on, and one paper wrote a most amusing article on the subject. Some may think us small-minded, but trifles like this helped on the hard drudgery of our lives; and Jack used to be ever ready with his sympathy. Often I have come to my rooms disappointed, down, and well-nigh heartbroken with troubles and failures, and Jack would scan my face eagerly, and then thrust his cold, ugly nose into one's hand, as if to assure me of his genuine interest. There is other speech than that of words, and somehow it was a relief to think that Jack knew one's trials and sympathised. 'All right, don't worry; of course I agree with you.' I am sure

that is what he wished to say, but he had his own way of conveying it. No awkward questions—just sympathy and assurance of support.

CHAPTER XI

ODDS AND ENDS

I SEIZED upon this title in desperation. The very nature of a book of this kind must of necessity be fragmentary, as it is, or pretends to be, just bits of life—snap-shots of the clergyman's work in a large, poor parish. Were I writing a novel, my task would be much easier. All that is necessary is a French cookery book, a pack of cards and a vivid imagination. A lady friend of mine who writes, whenever she gets her heroine or hero into a difficulty, simply shuffles the cards and makes the queen of hearts or the king of spades take the leading part, and lo! the question is solved. I hope when she reads this she will forgive me for letting

out her secret; perhaps the people who will condemn me most will be the publishers and the long-suffering public. Now that the secret is out, novelists will arise, of the quick-firing order, and a deadly hail of missiles in the way of books will be directed upon that great beating heart of all things literary, London. However, I selfishly think that this 'maiden effort' will get its innings first. Another point I have to consider is—that I have to write for the general public, therefore I cannot say what I like, or perhaps do as I would wish. So much has to be left out, and I have to go hop, skip and jump from one thing to the other. In my simplicity of heart I vainly imagined that my object in writing this was known to no man or woman living but myself. Yesterday, my little girl Mary, of two years and three months, or 'tooo an' korter,' as expressed in early English by herself, came into my library. She had evidently been showing her affection for the kitchen grate, or the one who was black-leading it. However, she had been thinking

over ways and means, evidently. 'Is oo writing, daddy?'

'Yes,' is my reply. 'Now run away and ask Barker to wash your face.'

'Is oo writing for pennies?'

'Unfortunately, yes.' In these days of diminishing tithes the question of bread and butter is an important one, so I may as well say my object in writing is money.

'Will oo give me some?' was the next question. I satisfied her on this point by promising a lump sum down. Half an hour afterwards she was back to see whether any of the pennies had arrived.

Some time ago a brother of the order, who has an outlying parish on the moors, called to see the Bishop. The parson, who is passing rich on about eighty pounds a year, had on a pair of fustian trousers. 'Mr B., do you consider it respectful to your Diocesan to visit him in such garments as those?'

'Well, my lord, you sent for me, and it meant coming in these or coming in none at all—for disobedience to your lordship's re-

quest never entered my mind,' was his reply. Yet the interest of the money spent on that same man's education would keep him in luxury compared with his present existence, which is devoid of all that makes life tolerable.

'There is a young lady to see you, sir,' said my housekeeper the other morning.

'Who is she?' I asked.

'Well, sir, she speaks like a lady, and I have put her in the drawing-room, but she is very badly dressed.'

'I think I know your face,' I said to her, as I brought her in beside the fire and asked her to take a seat.

'Yes; you preached for us once at our harvest festival. My father is Vicar of ——;' and then she hesitated, and a little colour came into her thin, pinched face. 'I have some Christmas cards here,' and she began to undo a small parcel, 'and I wondered whether you might care to buy any to send out this Christmas. They are my own painting,' she added shyly.

I looked through them as she gave them one by one into my hands. Poor child. They were dreadful daubs, and an attempt at drawing a ship was enough to make one smile, did not the whole circumstances of the case rather move one to tears. I glanced at them, and from them to the hungry, anxious face of my visitor. I dare not send such dreadful things to my friends without risking their friendship, but of course I pronounced them 'very nice indeed,' and took a dozen at sixpence each. If only one could have bought up the lot and sent her home. However, she left delighted. At the door she paused and said, 'You won't mention this to father, will you? Only my mother knows about it.' There was a story behind those Christmas cards, and some day it shall be told.

My first attempt at literature was prompted by poverty. For cheapness three of us lived together, and amongst us we wrote a book. It was a dead failure until a dissenting minister preached upon it. He held it up in

his hand in the pulpit and cursed it. Then the money came in. I might add that we published it at our own expense. An order from the colonies came for seventy pounds' worth. It seemed a fortune at the time. We kept that cheque for our friends to see. It was in such frequent use that we kept it on the mantelshelf. One day a colleague was reading the London paper. 'What bank is that cheque on?' he suddenly shouted. We rushed to see. Yes; our worst surmises were true. The cheque henceforth was valueless. Since that time I have always sent my cheques to the bank without delay, but it was a lot to pay for this useful hint, especially when trying to live on the princely sum of a hundred and twenty pounds per annum. In some parishes one could have lived comfortably, but not where so many around you were wanting bread. The seventy pounds were heavily mortgaged. We had in our reckless way tried to make it go as far as twice the amount, and that is how it took some time to recover. Fortunately each of us had a good watch, so

we tossed up to see which one was to be sacrificed for the common good. Curates and small means are, and have been for some time, synonymous terms. Now, vicars and rectors can be used to save tautology.

I cannot write a whole chapter about churchings. 'What has that got to do with the subject?' I hear the reader exclaiming. Nothing. But I said at the beginning 'odds and ends,' and this is my excuse.

A rector of a country parish, an example of education minus culture, had to take this service for his squire's wife, whom we shall call Lady C. He was a very polite man. He had read scores of books on etiquette. It struck him that it would never do to say, 'Save this *woman*, Thy servant.' So he altered it to 'Save this lady, my parishioner.'

The clerk, not to be outdone in politeness, responded,—

'Who putteth her ladyship's trust in Thee.'

A predecessor of mine once got into great trouble. The front pew under the pulpit is known as the 'churching pew.' If anyone

sat there on a Wednesday or Friday it is understood that it is with the object of 'returning thanks,' as my people term it.

The Vicar came out of the vestry and saw a young lady in this pew one Wednesday night. He motioned her to him and bade her kneel at the chancel steps. She was nervous, but she did as she was requested. When the clerk began to point out to her the answers she was requested to make, she jumped up, but the Vicar was proceeding with the service. His sister fortunately rushed to the lady in distress, and stopped the matter from going further. It turned out that she was a young lady visitor in the place, who had just dropped in for evensong. This illustrates the danger of leaving certain recognised customs to work themselves out. The plan of taking things for granted is fraught with dangers.

A curate once, as a lark, said he would walk out half up the street with the Bishop's hat on. We all roared; we fancied it an excellent joke. Lunch over, we made a move for the church where the Bishop was to preach.

The practical joker rushed past us in the hall, snatched up the episcopal Lincoln & Bennett, and went off. 'Why, Howard must have taken your lordship's hat,' said the Vicar, in a horrified tone. 'Nonsense,' grunted his lordship. By this time our friend had walked the distance he said he would, and he entered. 'Beg pardon, my lord, but I find I have taken the wrong hat,' he ventured. 'Which shows me you go about things in a thoughtless way,' gravely remarked our Diocesan. 'It shows a mind not regardful of detail, Mr Howard,' he continued; and from the Vicarage to the church poor Howard had a sermon which left him rather limp. He took it for granted that an apology would put matters straight, but it didn't. It is indeed a dangerous thing to play with a bishop. Personally I would as soon think of inviting a polar bear to tea. Even in giving advice one should be careful. 'If a town living falls vacant, I don't know a single unbeneficed man in my diocese to whom I could offer it,' said a bishop to me one day. 'Is that their fault, my lord, or yours?' I

remarked, and it was greeted with a frown. 'In what way do you mean, my brother?' he queried. (The bishop always calls me brother when he is—well, angry rather.) 'Don't you think, if you invited them to that big palace of yours, you would stand a better chance of knowing their capabilities, rather than trusting to the recommendations of rural deans?' 'Umph! There is another side to that, my brother. Cannot you put me on to a man for ——? It will be vacant soon.' 'No, my lord, on principle I decline. I think a bishop ought to know his men better.' 'What about your own men?' he asked. 'They are all good,' I said. 'There is X, who wants a living.' 'Too much show and too little work. If he blows his nose he manages to have it reported in the newspaper,' was the episcopal comment. 'What about Y?' 'He doesn't want a living, my lord; but there's Z.' 'Umph, promising young man, but not sufficient age on his shoulders. Mention it to Y, and see what he thinks. I don't want to offer and have it declined.' If bishops

would only see more of their unbeneficed clergy, invited them to their houses, and have them spend a week each year, say at the palace, I am sure it would help them. I once heard a soldier, speaking of Roberts, say, 'He is not only clever himself; he knows his men.' If our diocesans only knew their men, and regarded it as a first duty to know them, their difficult task of patronage would be much easier. I think prime ministers ought to make arrangements, when they offer a man a bishopric, that he shall for six months go through a course of training at the War Office, where he would see the scores of men pigeon-holed and specialised for certain posts. A man is wanted for some special work in Armenia. He can be found in twelve hours and less, if necessary, and he can start for the Antipodes in twenty-four. The clergy generally want more of the father in God bishop, and less of the prince—as represented not in actual life, but in the novel of the penny dreadful character, and in the third-rate drama. Bishops should be given to hospitality. If each bishop would glance back

for a year, and estimate the value of the hospitality he has given to his clergy, and compare it with the value of what he has received from them, it might be to their lordships a useful commentary on these words and themselves.

An elderly clergyman and myself once witnessed a piece of very great rudeness on the part of a bishop's wife towards a young nervous curate, whose friendly advances she met with an icy stare. I looked at my old friend. 'Do you know, it seems but yesterday that she was delighted once when I asked one of my own curates to take her in to dinner,' he said sorrowfully. 'Poor thing, she was pleased then if a curate handed her a cup of tea. Glad to be invited anywhere where she was likely to meet them. I am sorry for that young lad, but I am more sorry for the diocese. She will do a considerable amount of harm.' If we are to have married bishops, will those who bestow bishoprics have also a personal interview with the wife before making an absolute offer.

There are so many organisations now that a

bishop's wife feels it her duty to undertake, that this question is a most important one. I see no reason why a woman, because she is the wife of the spiritual head, should regard herself also as the other spiritual head. There are some clergy, too, who, when they write a confidential letter to their chief, resent a reply from the other spiritual chief. It involves, too, a legal point. The law of privilege will protect a clergyman communicating anything to his superior, which, repeated to anyone else, would be libel, and lay the vicar open to an action in the Court of Queen's Bench. Some of us one day will find ourselves in queer street if we attempt to extend privilege to the bishop's wife.

'But see what I save,' said a bishop to me once. 'The stipend of another chaplain is a consideration, and my stipend will hardly suffice to keep things going when my heavy insurance is paid.' Here again one could almost furnish an article on the abuse of episcopal incomes. Why should a diocese be starved in order to insure that the wife and children shall continue

to live in a palace, or the nearest approach? The bishops have none too much. I would be the last man to raise my voice for a revision and reduction of their incomes, but they should remember that they are theirs not to lord it over their clergy, but to place them above the petty worries of cash, and enable them, unfettered, to shepherd the sheep committed to their 'fatherly' care.

CHAPTER XII

OUR ORGANISTS

First of all, I should like to say that I never had a row with a choir or an organist in my life, and I think the reason of that is because I am musical. I have what is considered a good voice. I can read music fairly well, and play the organ. A great number of my clerical brethren are always in hot water either with their organist or choir, or both. I venture to think that it is often the fault of the clerics, who, not knowing music, criticise sometimes in unmeasured terms where they are not qualified, and, therefore, not justified in so doing. We have to remember, too, the more musical a man is, the more sensitive he is; and after playing through a service an organist is not in the frame of mind to begin to explain what

to him is a simple matter to understand, but which to an untrained man presents great difficulties, and may appear to show up his stupidity. Not for one moment do I say organists are always right and parsons are always wrong, but often, when the former has been wrong, he has been rubbed up the wrong way by a want of tact on the part of the vicar.

For some time I was precentor in a large church where the music was in the hands of a thoroughly capable man, whose name is well known as a composer. 'You will never get on with him,' said one of my colleagues. 'He has never been able to retain his place more than a couple of years anywhere.' But we did get on. When I wanted changes, or thought something could be improved or discontinued with advantage, I always asked him in to see me, or I would arrange to spend an hour or so with him, and over our cigars we always agreed. I am sure it is a fatal mistake to 'let fly' at the organist on a Sunday, or any time when he is at the church, for you can be sure his mind is full of his work, and

occupied with his difficulties and anxieties in regard to the choir. With these hints I pass on to some minor worries of my own.

My dear old Vicar was not musical, but, what made the matter much worse, he thought he was. The result was, the organist had a life of it. But the Vicar had a stentorian voice, and there were certain tunes on which, to use his own expression, he was 'very strong.' Once or twice, deceived by some similarity in the air, he has sung out his loudest in order to correct, as he supposed, the mistake of the choir. This was very awkward in the psalms. The boys in the stalls immediately below him would stop; perhaps the leader would receive a rap on the head as a warning from the Vicar; then those at the other side would stop, the result a breakdown until the organ crashed in with full diapasons and foundation stops. More than once the Vicar succeeded, by simple lung power, in changing the chant, and the organist, to save a breakdown, has changed with him; but to be rated afterwards in the

vestry for stupidity was more than flesh and blood could stand. Once the dear old man came down to church evidently in that frame of mind which is not conducive to peace and quietness. I saw he was in a temper, and kept out of his way as much as possible. He required management, and this method was an easy one. After service I was taking my departure when he called me back. 'What note did you sing the service in this morning?' he asked. 'A flat,' I answered. Had I said P flat it would have meant all the same to him, for he did not know a note. 'My dear ——,' he said, 'you must be mistaken; you missed your note at the very commencement, and I am sure you sang in G sharp!' 'Ah! perhaps I did,' I replied. This mollified him considerably, and he began then to talk of the choir and organist, both of which were the cause of complaint on his part. In the midst of our conversation in came the organist. 'Mr Daniels, Mr Daniels,' began the Vicar, 'what were *you* about this morning? You got very flat on that organ once or twice.' The

organist looked at me and then at the Vicar. 'Organ? flat? I played flat?' he jerked out in astonishment. 'Yes,' responded my chief, 'you got down and down; I wondered where you were going to take us to.' The organist appealed to me. It was useless; I had to put my head in a cupboard to laugh. But it was a long time before Mr Daniels could be got to see the joke in the light I did.

One day the organist, not this one, mentioned to me in great confidence that he had composed a grand 'Credo.' When could I hear him play it? He was a nice man, but his knowledge of harmony and counterpoint was rusty. Several rather pretty chants bore his name, but he was ambitious of a higher flight, and it took the form of a 'Credo.' On the Sunday afternoon he called and left the MSS. It was entitled 'The Credo,' with free accompaniment (descriptive). I guessed what was coming, and I was not wrong. It has always been a matter of regret to me that I did not write some notes upon the composition

at the time. I can remember the agonies of mind I went through as he played it; but I shall not readily forget one part. 'From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead,' was sustained over three bars, while the organ played the first part of the Dead March in Saul!

Speaking of 'creeds' reminds me of a story told by a colleague of mine as a personal experience. The Vicar asked the organist to put more life into his accompaniment of the 'Belief,' and on the Sunday following he did. When he came to the part, 'The Resurrection of the Body,' the congregation were horrified by the organist pulling out the trumpet stop and playing a well-known bugle call!

During my time at a large city church the post of organist fell vacant, and, being a musical man, the Vicar and churchwardens left the hundred and twenty applications to me to weed down to half a dozen. I waded through the letters and testimonials, and put to one side all those whose spelling was indifferent.

This brought the number down to ninety odd. Then I put out all under twenty and without some years' experience. This further reduced the number to seventy. Going over the papers again, I put aside the lady applicants, and those who merely signed their applications with initials. Thus, in the end, I had about forty to choose from, and these I resolved to interview. The reader will perceive that I was unnecessarily conscientious — I had just been ordained. A letter was sent to each, and they had the choice of a day, and for three days I sat and interviewed. Many of the applicants were excellent men, and well qualified for the post, but a very large number were neither the one nor the other. Somehow one of the ladies who had applied heard that I was interviewing, and came. The interview with her was a scene. She got very angry, and, among other things, called me a brute, and shook her umbrella in my face. I was very unfortunate that morning, for the next one to see me was

a man with a wooden leg. I ventured to suggest to him that the loss of a leg would, indeed, put him out of the running. This he did not agree with, so I took him to the organ. His attempts at the pedals were ludicrous, and sounded like the beating of a drum, and in the middle of a march his leg—the wooden one—got caught in between the notes, with a result that may be better imagined. He had the sixteen-feet open coupled to the great oct, as well as the foundation stops. It took me quite six or seven minutes to get him disentangled. He was not at all upset, but calmly remarked that it very rarely happened that he was not able to get his leg free *himself!* Another man, with fifteen years' experience as an organist, came. He began the interview by saying that he was a Nonconformist, but he had no objection to turning over to the Church. He added that a man was none the worse for being organist in a dissenting place of worship. I remarked that the difficulty would be in the service when he came to play it.

He begged to be allowed to play me something of his own composition, so I told the clerk to take him to the instrument, and I would follow. About five minutes afterwards I entered the church. He was coming out. 'There's something the matter with that there organ,' he said.

'Nonsense,' I replied.

'Yes, but there *is;* come and see.'

He sat down with his feet on the pedals, the sixteen-feet open was out coupled, and the result was a noise like thunder.

'Now, then, what do you think of that row?' he said triumphantly.

'You have your feet on the pedals,' I ventured.

'Why, where else can I put them?' he replied innocently, and he looked at me as much as to say, answer that poser. I found out afterwards that it was an American organ he was accustomed to play, hence his discomfiture.

The pedals were fatal to another applicant, who gravely informed me that 'no one

bothered about these things now.' This was delicious. I explained that the Vicar and churchwardens were rather old-fashioned in their views, and insisted upon pedalling as one of the accomplishments. He was very friendly over it, and seemed to sympathise with me in having to act for such men.

Sometimes members of the choir took to composing, but on the whole they were nice men. A tenor called upon me after service, and showed me a 'little thing' he had composed—words and music. I think he added that he had knocked it off in a hurry. It was called 'An Anthem for Evensong,' and, to his great disappointment, I felt called upon to refuse it. Perhaps I had better quote the first verse to justify myself, as I try to pose as tender and kind-hearted, and hesitate to hurt anyone's feelings. It was worthy of the olden days when parish clerks led the choir, and chose what tunes should be played.

I might add that the anthem was in the form of a hymn, and was as follows,—

'Abide with me, the evening draweth nigh,
Abide with me, the night is getting on,
Abide with me, until the morning cometh,
Then each man and maid must hie away to his work.'

The first verse of this will be sufficient. The music was strongly impregnated with the air of 'Cheer, Boys, Cheer!'

One organist had a very bad habit of humming things over during the sermon, to the great annoyance of a curate, who rather prided himself on his preaching. This Sunday night part of his subject was the 'angel voices' that sometimes spoke in some old half-forgotten song which came to us in the stillness of the night. Here he stopped to use his pocket handkerchief, and clearly and distinctly came upon our ears the well-known air from the intermezzo in 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' which the organist was humming to himself. The preacher crimsoned, and someone caught it afterwards. This particular organist was a very brilliant player, and I never heard his equal in playing a free accompaniment to a unison chant.

'Don't keep the lions too long roaring over their prey,' said an irreverent young curate to him one Sunday, when that psalm was one of those appointed for the day. 'I can understand your prolonging the agony when they lack and suffer hunger.' Of course it was said and received in joke, but it often crosses my mind now.

Since I have been Vicar of a parish, a prominent layman began composing, and actually bribed the organist, unknown to me, to play his compositions. Complaints about the organist's playing were many, and I had to step in. The MSS. of the amateur composer was indeed something to weep over. Somehow I must have mismanaged things, for he left the church, and his pocket is closed to all calls.

Once I got a mania for writing poetry myself. It was a very bad attack while it lasted; fortunately I was at a very youthful age, and was soon cured. These conceptions of mine I used to read over to my tutor's wife, who nodded and slumbered as I read,

but always woke up in time to say, 'Very nice indeed.' But there was a limit even to her patience, and once, after an unusually long effusion, I was recommended by her to read it to the Vicar, her husband. Next morning he said, 'I hear you have been writing poetry?' 'Yes,' I said proudly. 'Humph! Bring your poem into the library.' There I read it, and he listened to every word with his eyes fixed upon my enthusiastic face. At the end of about three quarters of an hour he said, 'Stay! Did *you* write that?' '*Yes*,' I answered, with emphasis. 'Every word?' he queried. 'Every word,' I said firmly, and I felt a glow of triumph. 'Well, don't write any more,' he said; and from his tone of voice I thought it best to follow his advice.

My advice to organists and choirmen is this. Unless you have a thorough knowledge of the fundamental principles of music, don't compose. Men of high rank in the musical world with difficulty manage to make their compositions pay, and the vast majority of composers lose, and lose heavily. If you

think you are a genius in this particular art, send your compositions to one of the musical papers, and hear what they have got to say, and if they say unkind things, put the music and the letter in the fire, and give up the attempt without making anyone else the wiser.

A clergyman's sister was married in my parish church some time ago, and in an evil moment the brother was tempted to compose, and fell. The tune was for one of the hymns to be sung at his sister's wedding, and was sent to me with a curt request to see that my choir learnt it *thoroughly*. I wrote back a gentle letter, and suggested his correcting some of the more flagrant errors. Foolish man, in my ignorance I had ventured to question the harmonies of the man who for three years had trained a choir 'all by himself,' and composed scores of tunes! So he informed me, but he did not mention that the choir trained by him was that of a village of less than a hundred people. So the tune was not put into our MSS. books, and I went into his black book, I fear, instead. His mother has

never forgiven me, but his sister has, and I sometimes think she is even grateful for my firmness in suppressing the special tune.

One passage in his remarkable letter is worth quoting—'Admitting for the sake of argument that there are consecutive fifths in the composition, I am sure you dare not write to (here followed a long list of musical celebrities), and point out to them their errors.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE HUMOUR OF TEMPERANCE WORK

'WHY don't you give up the drink, Bill?'

The speaker was the secretary of our parochial temperance society. He was very narrow in his views, but earnest and thoroughly sincere. George Cobb, for such was his name, was one of the most devoted workers in the parish; we were doing a little visiting together, and he threw in this question as an addition to the conversation between myself and a member of a benefit society.

'I *am* giving it up. What's the jaw about now?' was the gruff reply.

'Why, I saw you coming out of the Douglas the other evening,' said Cobb. I became a spectator and a listener.

'Why, what if you did? There an't no harm in that, and you should be the last to blame me for coming *out* of a public-house,' and Bill Brewster chuckled at this little sally.

'That's all very well, but it's not giving up the drink,' replied Cobb.

'Oh, that's all right; I am giving it up by degrees,' said Bill, nothing daunted, and he winked knowingly at me.

'Well, it's just here,' continued Cobb, who was considered a great hand at 'arguing a thing out.' 'Suppose you was at the bottom of a coal pit, and you wanted to be up to the light again, and—hold on!' as the other man interrupted—'suppose you asked me to haul you up and I did, *by degrees*, mark you, one foot a day. What would you think of me?'

'Why, I should think you a fool,' answered Brewster unhesitatingly.

'Exactly,' said Cobb, well satisfied with the forced inference. 'That is just what I consider you are—a fool. There's your bull pup. Do ye think he would touch the cursed stuff?

Why don't you take example of the dumb hanimal?'

Cobb always threw in the letter H when he got excited.

'Oh, I suppose I must go killing cats at night and that sort of thing, and get myself into the lock-up. Nice kind of thing that!'

George Cobb coloured; he saw that he had let himself into a difficulty. 'Yes, I would rather see you in the lock-up than a pub.'

Such was the passage-at-arms, which ended, as most of them did end, as a drawn battle, and my friend and I moved on. Cobb and I differed on many points, and agreed to do so, but in spite of all we were great friends, and I admired his work, for he gave up all his spare hours after a hard day's toil as a roadsman under the Corporation to the seeking out and endeavouring to reclaim the drunkards. His constant companion in the temperance mission was Anthony Tindle, a drayman employed by one of the largest breweries in the north. He was a big Yorkshireman with a tremendous voice. Once Anthony was making a grand

speech. I say grand, because he spoke at length, and had worked himself into a fever of excitement. Now, while he spoke, I saw some young men whose looks spoke mischief, and I determined to keep my eye on them. Things went on smoothly, and I was just casting my eyes over the agenda paper, and making a few mental notes, when suddenly a loud report rang out, something burst in my poor friend's face, and with a terrified shout, 'My God! I am shot!' poor Anthony fell heavily on the platform. For the moment I was conscious of a horrible dread, for Tindle the day previous had shown me an anonymous letter warning him that if he persisted in speaking at the meeting, the individual who sent this communication would shoot him. Bill Brewster, who had signed the pledge, and Cobb were soon examining the fallen man, while someone else endeavoured to restore order to the meeting. I found that I was covered almost with flour. What had happened was this. A mischievous lot of lads had lighted a wretched thing called a bomb,

and when it exploded one had hurled a ball of flour, which struck Tindle between the eyes. As it was, no harm was done, of course, but my poor old friend received a great shock, and it was his last attempt at public speaking. Temperance meetings then were not the quiet gatherings we have now. Often publicans, I fear, paid a gang of men to come in and make a disturbance. They were not exactly violent, but rotten eggs, cabbages and potatoes were freely used as missiles. The Bishop came down one evening and sat at the back. He had been out in the country, and was splashed up with mud, and for a bishop he looked anything but clean. One of the working men who acted as doorkeepers handed him a hymn book and welcomed the stranger. He was new, and had not met the Bishop before.

'Curate?' queried the working man.

'I was once,' said the Bishop, rather severely.

'Drink? questioned the temperance advocate.

The Bishop was too shocked to reply at

once. Then it dawned upon him what his questioner meant was all in good part, and he began to explain.

'Never mind! never mind!' said the man, interrupting him, who probably did not catch all the Bishop said, as a hymn was being lustily rendered. 'Glad to see you. Take the pledge, and that there gentleman in the chair will give you a helping hand;' and he pointed to me, the curate. The Bishop told me this story afterwards, and laughed heartily over the man's mistaken zeal.

All my workers were not so sincere as this one. I wanted to see the assistant secretary one dinner time, and as I could get no answer to my repeated knocks, I opened the door and walked in. The family were at dinner, and by the right of my friend and helper was a glass of beer. The man never hesitated; his hat was on his head. This he removed, with a bow and a 'How d'ye do,' and placed it over the glass and its contents. A few evenings afterwards he was walking home with me from church. I thought it a good

opportunity. 'It wasn't beer you were having the other day when I looked in, Jack, was it?' I ventured. 'Well, sir, it was.' 'But how about your pledge?' I asked. 'Pledge!' he repeated; 'but, sir, there are exceptions to every rule. I agree with the pledge, but I like to be large-minded on these questions!'

This story is not unlike that of a Scotch minister. 'Well, Donald, and they tell me ye were drinking with that loon Cameron?'

'Ay, I was,' said the culprit.

'But are ye no a teetotaler? Did ye no take the pledge in ma presence?'

'Oh, ay. I'm a teetotaler, but I'm no a bigoted ane. I ha'na' patience wi' bigoted people,' added Donald, with a significant glance at his pastor and spiritual adviser.

A temperance orator was holding forth to a big meeting of working men. 'You remember when the rich man was in hell, and saw Lazarus afar off. What did he ask for? Why, water, of course. I want you to notice this, it is particular. Water,' he repeated again. 'Now, what did that show?' 'That teetotalers

go to hell,' shouted someone at the back, and I must say the speaker was demoralised. He floundered, and finally sat down amidst great laughter.

There was a proposal made in connection with this society that women should be allowed on the council. I had my misgivings about it, and I felt disaster and trouble were ahead. However, they were unanimous about it, and I gave way. The next step was a proposal that women should speak. I had expected this, and I knew that an explosion was only the question of a few weeks, but it came the very first night. One prominent worker was a woman named Laidler. I never liked her, for she had a mischievous tongue. However, she worked the oracle so that she was put on to speak. She came second on the list. When her turn came, she stood up to the table, and I saw her eye was upon a woman whom she had had some words with during the year. Her speech was not long, and as it was one to be remembered, I give it. 'Dear friends and Christian people all,—I

have been a teetotaler for seven-and-twenty year, and when I say a teetotaler I *means* it. I am not like some hussies who come here regular—' Here I interposed, and requested her not to use the offensive word. She nodded and closed her eyes, a habit she had when vexed, and continued. 'As I was saying, I am not like some people sitting not far from me as I am standing on this platform—hussies as is always running with a jug—' Again I stopped her, and in a severe tone requested her not to use the word hussy again. 'Well, then, that woman there!' she screamed, and she pointed to her enemy aforementioned. The next instant they were at each other's throats, and I draw a veil over the rest.

Undoubtedly a great deal of damage was done to the cause of temperance by the injudicious and intemperate language of some of our speakers. With uneducated men one was prepared to accept a great deal of extravagance, but what astounded me was the non-

sense talked by people whose education was above the ordinary. Looking back over one's experiences, I am bound to confess that I consider the Temperance Society a failure. I can remember when the Town Hall, capable of seating several thousands, was not large enough for the annual meeting, and while I was curate in that same town I saw this meeting held in an ordinary room, with heaps of room. The temperance idea is a good one. It is ruined by its intemperate advocates. Frankly I must admit when opponents, as we called the non-abstainers, stood up against us in debate, we were beaten, and badly beaten. Never shall I forget one occasion. A great temperance reformer came from London. As he had a handle to his name, there was a good number to welcome him. He began by quoting some poetry of his own composition. He told us it was poetry; that is why I know it was. Well, he was a fluent speaker, and he got a fair hearing. At the end criticisms were invited, and a publican or a brewer got up amidst howls and cat-calls. However, I

appealed for order. The man spoke very quietly and to the point. He said he would not attempt to reply to the worthy gentleman's speech—that such a speech could be delivered and applauded by temperance advocates showed him they had nothing to fear, for there was still the broad common sense of the country to take such pabulum at its right value. 'I wish,' he went on, 'the speaker had used greater decency in speaking of those who make and those who sell the common beverage of the people, not for my sake, but for the sake of the Christian religion, which I profess, in spite of being a publican; for we must remember that when we condemn the drink, those who drink and those who make it, we condemn our great Elder Brother, Christ, who, if the Bible narrative be true, was not ashamed to be seen in the company of those who took wine, and on one occasion provided that beverage Himself. Frankly, I regard your speaker as a fool,' he added, 'but I ask those gentlemen in clerical garb on the platform why he was not called to order for

his indecent language and sweeping condemnation.' My reply was a lame one, I fear, and the meeting broke up with a general uncomfortable feeling that somehow we had been sat upon. I think I am wiser now.

There was another speech which I feel I must quote. This was from a converted clown, I think. Certainly his antics did a great deal in the way of amusing his audience. I made notes at the time, so I can give his argument almost word for word. He bounced on to the platform as if shot out of a gun. The first few minutes were spent in a kind of dumb show which called forth peals of laughter—then he began. 'I'm a man,'—pause. 'There's another,' pointing to me—more dumb show. 'Some people may say that there isn't a man sitting in that there chair,'—pause. 'I want yer'all to look 'ard. Don't believe there is a man there 'cos I says so,' which seemed to me to put a strange construction upon his veracity. 'Now, then, are you all sure there's a man there?' 'Yes,' responded the people. 'Very well, then, how can any man refuse to be a

teetotaler? Those who says there isn't a man there are no better than drinkers. Don't know what is right and what is wrong,' etc., etc. 'In fact, they don't know nothing.' The proceedings were brought to a close by singing,—

'Hurrah! for the pump, hurrah!
I'll drink of it once again.
Hurrah! for the pump, hurrah!
She's the *old girl* for me.'

To hear people solemnly singing a doggerel like this was too much, especially as it was to be followed by prayer at the end. This evening we dispensed with the religious ceremony. There was too much comedy. The converted clown figured rather badly after that in circumstances which I cannot relate here.

During Lent a special service was held in the adjoining parish for cripples, aged and infirm. Interest was stimulated by offering to each one who came a package of groceries. The Vicar had a converted barman to preach on that occasion. The room was not large, and there were about thirty old people, many of whom

had come on crutches or hobbled on sticks. My own idea was that the scheme was a very cruel one, as many of the poor old bodies got up out of their warm beds in order to be present. However, other people thought differently. I took a shortened form of service, then the converted barman held forth. He told them that he had given up one of the biggest hotels in London in order to 'serve the Lord.' He said he was amply repaid when he saw before him such a gathering of people. He spoke as if he were addressing thousands on a big moor; but the funniest part was when he thanked them for coming.

'You might have stayed in your houses! You might have gone to the Town Hall, and at this moment have been whirling along in the giddy dance!' The spectacle of these aged cripples—the maimed, the halt and the blind—whirling along in the giddy dance was too much for me. I hid my face and laughed, which so far disconcerted the orator that he stopped and gave out a hymn. All in the room took the pledge, and he was satisfied.

This was often quoted afterwards as a most successful meeting.

If I have dwelt upon the weaknesses of the temperance party, do not imagine I condemn it. There are hundreds of devoted workers, but there are more who run the thing as a hobby; many, alas! for notoriety. Their methods need correction. During my time I succeeded in getting men to take the pledge, but I am convinced that I did more good when I resigned my position in the C.E.T.S., and appealed to men to give up *excess* rather than give up beer altogether. 'I can take beer without getting drunk. Are you not man enough to do the same?' This, I often found, produced the required result, and I heartily recommend it to my brother clergy.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HUMOUR OF PREACHERS AND PREACHING

Most parsons have a vivid recollection of their first sermon, and the delicious joy of it when the Vicar says, 'I shall want you to preach on the second Sunday of this coming month.' But quickly on the heels of the first emotions aroused come fear, dread, and a sinking feeling at the heart as the hour gets nearer. At first you have so many subjects, such a crowd of ideas, that it takes hours each day to go over them and decide which it shall be. As it gets on towards the fatal day and no sermon prepared, all seems to go from your mind, and you find yourself saying, 'What on earth shall I preach about?' In desperation you gravely consider

whether it would not be better to get a colleague to take it *this* time. Then come sleepless nights. There is the horrible nightmare when you dream that you have broken down helplessly, or you are chasing someone who has stolen your sermon notes, but cannot overtake them, or the bells are ringing for service and you cannot find the MS., or the way out of the house. I went through all this.

The church from which I took my title had no pulpit. Well do I remember the Vicar showing me round it, and I innocently asked where the pulpit was. 'There isn't one. We always preach from the altar steps.' 'But,' I ejaculated, 'what am I to do?' 'How do you mean?' he asked calmly. 'Why, where am I to rest my MS.?' I said in astonishment. 'We never use MS. here; you must preach without that.' I broke out into a perspiration; the cold brutality of the way in which he imparted this intelligence prompted me to seize him and shake him. I was desperate. Here I was—a fixture for

two years to a church where I was expected to preach without MS.; denied, too, the protection of a pulpit.

The last sleepless night, followed by the fatal day, arrived. Oh, the agony of it. I took one hurried glance at my notes within my Bible with one loving, anxious look, as one embarking for the Antipodes takes leave of his nearest and dearest, walked out of my stall to the altar steps, and faced the congregation of over two thousand people. The minor details of the scene stand out with graphic clearness. I can see the Vicar calmly yawning as if this crisis in my life were one of the commonest of events. I see the eyes of my colleagues, in which I detected a look of good-humoured pity. A choir boy by way of encouragement worked one side of his mouth up into a smile and nudged his companion, who immediately turned his attention to me and grinned, with the keenest enjoyment of my nervousness. Then it dawned upon me that the people were waiting for my text, which I made a hash of at the very outset. This was

evidently regarded as a tremendous joke by the choir boys, and I thought one young rascal was going to end up his manifestations of mirth in a fit. My words at first would be described in music as 'staccato.' There were whole handfuls of full stops thrown in and semi-colons, with pauses of unusual length. I saw one of the sidesmen turn away and laugh. This, I fancy, roused me. I determined to make that man listen. The sea of faces disappeared; I was talking to Anthony Tindle; and unconsciously I became, so I was told afterwards, quite eloquent, but the first five minutes of that sermon must have been very painful to those who had to listen. Strange to say, I have never felt really nervous since. But the first plunge—I shudder now as I recall it.

A young clergyman, who shall be nameless, once called upon a celebrated preacher. 'I want to be able to preach without MS.,' he said. 'Can you tell me the right way to go to work?' 'Oh, yes,' the preacher replied; 'it is very simple. You require confidence.

Just take some simple subject at first that you thoroughly understand yourself, and then clap a text on to it, having regard to the fit, and then simply *talk* to the people.' The young deacon thanked him. On the Sunday following he boldly mounted the pulpit without scrip or note of any kind, and gave out his text, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?' (pause). He repeated the text again (longer pause).

'Scripture can only be explained by Scripture'—pause—'therefore let us see what the other evangelist says on this important subject.' Here he took up his Bible and spent some time finding what he required, when he read out, 'Are not *five* sparrows sold for two farthings? Here, my brethren, we have one sparrow unaccounted for—a discrepancy in fact' —pause—'a difficulty, I might say. How shall we reconcile the two statements? It is quite simple, but it illustrates a great truth—the generosity of the Lord's dealings with men. You lay out one farthing and you get two sparrows. You lay out two farthings and the

Lord throws a sparrow in.' And here he stopped, unable to proceed further.

A colleague of mine—an eloquent preacher —was constantly making the most amusing slips in his preaching. He was once speaking upon Reverence for Holy Places, and took for his text, 'Take off thy shoes from off thy feet.' His splendid discourse was quite spoilt by his rendering of the text, which he would persist in giving as 'Take off thy feet from off thy shoes!' The Vicar mentioned it to him afterwards. In the evening, the Vicar himself distinguished himself by giving out the startling text, 'Though your wool be as scarlet,' etc., etc. This frequently happens where the preacher is a rapid speaker.

A poetical brother of our acquaintance was speaking at the Diocesan Conference to working men — Why they didn't attend church. He convulsed his hearers by saying that he knew the attractions of a '*nosey cook*.' What he meant to say was *rosy nook*. The same man gave a new version to the hymn, 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains.' 'During the

offertory, which will be for the S.P.G., we will sing No. —, "From Iceland's Greasy Mountains."' No one ventured to start the tune, for each person in the room and on the platform was exerting every energy to keep a straight face, and a large number did not succeed.

It is the fashion of the hour to sneer at sermons, and the jeers are legion. We can excuse them where there is genuine wit, but many of the criticisms are thoughtless and unjust. A chit of a girl, who, by her age and experience, was incapable of one deep or serious thought, was regarded by her mother as a marvellously clever girl. 'You should hear her on Mr A.'s sermons,' the mother said to me one day. 'But why doesn't she write better ones for him?' I replied. People forget that a preacher is a target. A solicitor can muddle his case; a doctor can err in his treatment of a patient. He does not act with the eyes of the public upon him, nor would the ordinary man or woman pretend to criticise. But there is

not a man, woman or child now who does not consider himself or herself a born theologian, and in the first rank as critical exponents of Biblical exegesis. Plain, practical sermons are, alas! on the decrease. So many preachers have regard more for pleasing their hearers than fearlessly delivering their Master's message. Men will listen to a man who does his best to speak upon the Cardinal Beliefs of Christendom. Dogma, supported by the solid arguments which can be readily laid hands upon, I believe men enjoy listening to, and they talk of it afterwards in the clubs and in their family. But the sort of thing that so many clergy go in for now is beauty of expression and poetic utterances, or, as a great statesman put it, they express themselves in highly-polished, incomprehensible nothingisms. Men are thirsting for truth, and the blank cartridge of the majority of pulpits sickens them. They don't want to hear about 'rosy nooks.' They don't want to know that 'a rosy fragrance hung over the rare shrubs and tall, fantastic

trees,' as Ahab walked in his garden; or that 'a rich yet darker tint suffused the distant landscape as the sun still lingered before it finally settled in the west.' They don't care whether 'the distant sea was sobbing and moaning,' as Moses viewed the Promised Land from Nebo. This is the thing that pleases schoolgirls and silly women. The time allowed for preaching is too short for this kind of thing. Preachers should remember that it is much more difficult to revive faith than to create it, and he should seize the opportunity which the sermon gives to reiterate the old truths for which men have lived and died. The teaching of the day should be the order of the day, signed and countersigned by the Church and Him whose commission we bear.

There is something to be said for the Yorkshire miner. A man came to preach in his chapel. The preacher was very starchy —very stand-offish and highly poetical. The miner took a number of his chums to Ebenezer to hear this student, who had come

straight from college. 'I am the Light of the World' was his text, upon which he proceeded to drawl out what he no doubt considered was a beautiful discourse. The miner, who was one of the chief men in the chapel, grew restless. At last he could stand it no longer. Up he jumped. 'Thou wants snuffin',' he exclaimed angrily, and with his companions he left the building.

All verbosity should be avoided. Our sermon should proceed like a proposition of Euclid, step by step to a point. Hammer that home and then stop. Preaching must be teaching, if it is to be of any value. Don't prolong the close. A minister was preaching on the same text, 'The Light of the World.' He wouldn't finish, and the prolonged ending roused the impatience of an old woman, who looked up and remarked, 'I think you've brunt down int' socket now.'

Another evil of the present day is sensationalism in religion, and certainly in preaching. One day, in going through the town, I saw immense bills stuck up everywhere—

'Bottled Tears.'

A wag had written in pencil underneath—

'Sobs on Draught.'

I thought it was some new scent about to be put on the market, but a small boy was delivering bills, from which I gathered that the Rev. Moses Cotton was announced to preach on this subject.

The Vicar of a large midland town once gave notice that on the following Sunday he would preach on a grave family scandal. The church was besieged long before the bells began to ring. To the disgust of the congregation, the subject preached upon was 'Esau and Jacob.' Sensationalism is destructive of all real spiritual work. All such vulgarity of the market place is fatal to the steady building up of Christ's kingdom. 'Have you got a new minister for your chapel?' I said to a friend of mine one day who was a keen upholder of the Baptists. 'Not yet,' he replied. 'We want a young chap who can run the show

and make it pay. I have three hundred pounds in that building, and I want to see my interest.'

There is an increasing tendency to self-advertisement. To see the vicar of a big parish dancing attendance upon a reporter who is as innocent of the Queen's English as he is of theology, in order to get a puff into the local paper about his Sunday's sermon, is degrading. A curate I once knew regularly appeared in one of the local papers as 'having preached to an overflowing church full of people who crowded to listen to him.' It came out afterwards that he was in the habit of furnishing a reporter with one of the paragraphs each time he preached. As a matter of fact, the church in question was always well attended, whether the junior curate, the senior or any one else preached. He reminds one of that celebrated cock who thought that the sun rose each morning just to hear him crow.

The Bishop's little son said to me one day at lunch, 'I like your preaching better than my father's.' He had a little more

pudding and then added, 'Because your sermons are so short. I like to kick my feet about, but I can keep still until *you* are finished.'

I was a deacon at the time. 'You will come and hear me preach on Wednesday evening?' I said to an old woman whom I was calling upon. 'Oh, yes, sir; I always come when I know you are preaching. I am sure of getting a good seat, and I needn't hurry to church,' was her frank utterance. It was the truth, too. In the north country people are very frank.

Sometimes we were hard up for teachers in our mission Sunday school. A splendid specimen of Northumbrian womanhood volunteered to look after the young bairns, as she called them. She was speaking to her large class of infants on Jonah. I cannot give the whole story, but an extract. 'Well, as a was sayin', Jonah went our bord, and up comes the big whale. Jonah was arfully freetened at first, but the whale spoke to him quite friendly-like. "Come in, Jo; come in out of the

wet," and he took him inside his gullet.' This is a sample of the way she used to speak to children. Certainly she was able to retain their attention, which is more than I could say always for the preaching of the clergy when they took children's services.

Awkward mistakes occur sometimes through falling into certain mannerisms of expression. A friend had a habit of frequently saying, 'for years and years and years' in the course of a sermon. He was preaching on the Prodigal Son, and spoke of him sitting down in that far-off land thinking of the home that he had not seen 'for years and years and years.' This was all right, but presently he spoke of the welcome to his old home, and of the calf which his father had kept in anticipation of that happy day. 'Yes,' said my friend, dropping into his favourite cadence for the winding up of a sentence; 'yes, the calf which he had kept "*for years and years and years.*"' Then somebody laughed. A clergyman in the north, of Cathedral rank, had a number of MS. sermons left him by his

great-uncle, an Irish dean. Occasionally these discourses are heard from that Cathedral pulpit, and here and there odd expressions occur which tell their own tale. 'I remember being in Florence in the year 1792—I mean, it happened once in Florence towards the close of last century.' But sometimes he was not able to pull himself together so neatly, as when he refers, for example, to the virtues of His Sovereign Majesty George IV., and events which happened some ninety years ago. I remember once hearing a man give out his text in seven distinct different ways, thus,—

Do you now believe?

Do you now believe?

Do *you* now believe?

Do you *now* believe?

Do you now *believe?*

At the sixth time he sank his voice to a solemn whisper of the words; then, with a demoniacal kind of yell, he shrieked out the words for the seventh time at the highest pitch of his voice. A woman in front of me went off into hysterics, and two girls were

carried out fainting. In the report which appeared afterwards, it spoke of his hearers being strongly moved. In which direction was not stated. Shortly after that he fell out of a pulpit in some church where he was conducting a mission, and seriously injured himself.

And what shall we say about the affectation so prevalent in the pulpit? 'Arnd the glowry of the Load shown round about thame.' This was his rendering of 'And the glory of the Lord shone round about them.' I dare not mention the name of the celebrated ecclesiastic, but he is often heard in London, and his friends say that he did not talk in that way until society took him up, and he became a fashionable preacher. A well-known bishop talks about the 'Lard and Gard,' and a clergyman who expects to be a bishop some day has adopted the same phraseology, evidently regarding it as the real episcopal patois. Why is it that preachers will take such liberties with the vulgar tongue?

Then we have the affectation in proper names. A man who was baptised as Thomas Williams

is beginning to have bills printed, announcing that on a certain date the Rev. T. Raymond Williams will preach, etc. A friend is now engaged in comparing the names of men prominently before the public with those in the baptismal registers of their birthplace. I cannot give him away by quoting as I should like; but before long an interesting article will make revelations on this subject which will rather astonish the admirers of men with taking names. They will learn that the Rev. Harry Seymour Bouncer was not given that title by his godfathers and godmothers, but simply Henry Samuel Bouncer. And the Rev. Warwick Prince Warwick will hardly be recognised as William Peter Warwick; and the Rev. Hastings Delavel Hastings will be simply no one under the plain, homely garb of Henry David Hasting. Then who will care to hear the Rev. Esmond le Ather when they know that his real name is Edward Leather? A man I know very well always signs himself J. Joicey-Smith. A solicitor wrote to him, and addressed the letter J. Joicey Smith. There was a dread-

ful row. The solicitor was interviewed, and told that the name was Joicey hyphen Smith, and instructions were given to the clerk. The next letter was addressed—

J. Joicey Hyphen Smith, Esq.

The growth of double names for preachers has of late years been abnormal. The Rev. J. E. W. Smithson-Smith, and even threefold names—J. Knave-Windsor-Knave—make their appearance in the list of preachers. Oh, the vanity of it! *O tempora! O mores!*

CHAPTER XV

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The slums of a large town embrace and swallow up lives with strange histories. Once sunk beneath the surface, once become one of the items of the submerged tenth, it is difficult to rise and swim again. Many find relief in the oblivion, and deliberately become lost to human ken; but frequently other feelings predominate, and longing eyes are cast back upon the former life. Something stirs the memory and softens the heart—some melody sung in happier days, some half-forgotten strains of music, some stray remark of the preacher goes right home into the heart; the conscience rebels, the memory comes to its aid. The ghosts of the past are startled

from their graves, and no power can lay them. Discarded innocence rises up like an apparition, confronts the sinner, and a craving to visit once more the garden of Eden is the result; but the gate is barred, and the flaming swords of wronged society safely guard it. These are not mere fictions of the writer. A sad case comes up before me now, and I give it. I could tell many such stories, but hers was particularly sad. There are details which I must omit, but, alas! her story will always be with us where women are weak and men are bad. This poor creature at regular periods would steal away by rail in order to see once more her home of childhood. Under cover of darkness she would wander about in the garden where she had played as a girl. With stealthy tread she would approach the house and peer in at the windows just to get a look at her father and mother sitting by the fire with her younger sisters, just as she had sat herself when she was as innocent as they. Unknown to them she would hover about for

hours, and then trudge back to the town which sheltered and hid her shame. Only when she was dying did she tell me all the details of her life, and she deserved more of pity than of anger. For some time she lingered on in a garret in the last stages of consumption, but the pain of her disease was nothing compared with the agony of her remorse. She had tasted of the tree of good and evil, and it had cost her the tree of life. Just a few hours before she died the Great Blessed Peace, which only those who have watched by a death-bed can realise, came upon her, and quietly and bravely her spirit passed away, to lay her temptation and her guilt before her Maker. But I felt assured, and I think she did too, that in her Father's House in Heaven she had already received that forgiveness which was denied her in her father's house on earth.

A number of people—a number of preachers—are fond of saying how dreadful is the thought that we shall be judged by God. All I can say is, that I am indeed thankful to know that I shall be judged by God, and not by my

neighbours. I am one who believes that men and women are better than they are thought to be, better than they make themselves out to be, but we have so many self-constituted judges amongst us who put the worst construction on everything they see, and certainly exaggerate everything they hear. Women, I believe, are the worst offenders; very often, too, the most regular attendants at the parish church. Men will say in a good-humoured way, 'Smith is an ass;' Jones has made a fool of himself;' or 'Brown comes rather badly out of that;' but women can kill each other's character by a suggestion of detail that at times is just shocking. A man, when he does descend to gossip and slander, when he does drop into feminine ways of petty spite, is more dangerous to society than the worst criminal of the slums. Such characters make us regret at times that duelling has passed out of fashion. There are so many ways in which a man can annoy a lady and ruin her reputation, and the law cannot touch him. Very often, too, a sensitive mind revolts from the idea of a law court.

If there were still the danger of being called out, this description of brute would not have so happy a time. The distinction, then, between gentleman and cad was much more sharply drawn, and the latter were certainly kept in order by the only thing which will keep them in order—fear, and regard for their carcase. When a man knew that he might be called out for his utterances, he was very careful as to what he said, and the result of that governing influence is still felt for men. Take them all round, when they do comment upon their brother's shortcomings or his fall, are not half as bitter as women. Do not for one moment imagine that I am advocating the re-introduction of the duel, but I have a lurking suspicion that its abolition has not been all gain. I think a Court of Honour in each town, with power to grant permission to the injured party to call his man out, has something to be said in its favour, especially if such a court were properly constituted.

Beneath the surface one comes across a strange medley of character. What a late

captain in the army can find in the friendship of an ignorant and drunken umbrella mender seems difficult to solve at first sight, until you find that together they make a living. I knew two such. One was a north of Ireland man and a fiery Protestant, as he called himself; the other was a Roman Catholic of good family in the west of County Galway. They fought and broke the furniture over each other's heads, but the two would have combined to kill anyone who interfered. The captain had toothache one night. Dennis—I don't know his other name—suggested that it should be hauled out. A council of war was held on ways and means, and their common bank was found to have to their credit one shilling and a halfpenny. 'I'll just nip up the street and see the dintist what he'll be in the way of charging loike to pull it out. Now, capten, m'dear, what d'ye say?' Consent having been secured, Dennis went off. There was a lot of beating about the bush, as he was anxious to drive a bargain with the man who extracted the molars. Dennis meant to

have the price out of him first, so that he should not run his gentleman—the 'capten' —up to a bigger figure.

'An' what would you be charging for a tooth like this now?' and Dennis opened his great mouth and pointed to one of his own grinders. 'Let me see,' said the man with the forceps. Dennis opened his mouth wider, giving a good view. The dentist saw a tooth touched with decay, and being anxious to get it over for Dennis's sake, put one arm round his neck, the forceps into his mouth, and after a brief but sharp tussle the tooth was out.

'Sixpence for that,' said the dentist, as he calmly threw the tooth into the fire.

'Begorra! it's the wrong tooth and the wrong man you've got to dale with this time!' shouted the enraged Irishman, and he rushed upon the operator. However, the young dentist knew how to use his fists, and Dennis was soon put out of action by a stunning blow which caught him under the jaw. Then explanations were entered into, and the dentist

promised to pull out the 'capten's' grinder for nothing.

'So I got the best of it afther all, ye see,' he said, as he explained the case to me. 'He would have been charging the darlint a shilling —and maybe's more.' The captain was out on his rounds returning the repaired umbrellas and getting in the money when Dennis related the story. I never learnt his true history. He was always neat and clean, a striking contrast to his friend and companion, and a most interesting man to talk to.

Another strange friendship existed between Bill Bruce, a tinner by trade, who stood six feet three in his socks, and was proportionately stout and ponderous, and Natty Findlay, a journeyman tailor, who was under four feet. Natty, I am sorry to say, was either drinking hard, which was pretty often, or he was in gaol; but when he did work he earned good money. He was a tremendous man for talking, drunk or sober, and was a declared enemy of all government—and the police. He said the people ought to

govern themselves, and that the present system of parliaments was a delusion and a sham. I went in one day to see them. They were having tea, hot toast and red herrings, and Bill Bruce invited me to join. Don't be shocked, reader, I did, and I was enjoying my herring and thickly-buttered toast when Natty must needs begin to abuse the British Government, as he called it. 'Shut up, Nat,' said his friend; but he would not shut up, and didn't. Furthermore, he informed the lordly Bill Bruce, who was descended from the Kings of Scotland, that he was a free man, and owned allegiance to nobody.

'Shut up, Nat,' quietly remonstrated Bill, 'and don't make a hass of yourself before the parson.' In order to give emphasis to his remarks, the little man sprang upon the table and began to kick the cups and saucers, tea and toast in various directions, by way of showing that he was a free man, as he stated. Then Bill Bruce put down the saucer of tea, taking care to drink

the tea first, and seizing the little tailor, who was now kicking like an infuriated mule, he put him across his knee, and illustrated tyranny in its most elementary and best known form. Frequently I have seen Bill Bruce staggering home drunk with the helpless tailor under his arm quite unable to walk at all. What the attraction was between these two I never could make out.

Sometimes they would appear at church, their faces scrubbed and polished into a bright red glow. On these occasions Bill wore a silk hat, loaned for the occasion from a second-hand clothes shop in the vicinity at the rate of threepence for the day. Bill would find the places for his friend, and give him the book, as much as to say, 'There you are; I, of course, know the service by heart, and need no books.' Christmas morning always saw these two at service, but the evening generally saw them the worse for drink. Once Natty showed his disapproval of something in the sermon by giving vent to a

peculiar snort, but it was at once suppressed by Bill, who brought his great hand down on the little chap's head with a smack that was heard outside the building, I should think. Good Friday was another occasion when the top hat was in requisition, and accompanied Bill to church. The man was always a model of reverence, and, apart from the drink, he was by no means a bad fellow. He was a great admirer of mine, and, in order to show his appreciation, he made and presented me with a speaking trumpet.

One of the most dangerous characters in the parish was a man with one arm; in place of the other he had a hook. He was the terror of the district, for he had a vile temper, and, when roused, the artificial limb was his chief weapon of offence and defence. He could work it with the rapidity of a windmill in a strong breeze. Bill Bruce used to help me to deal with him. He would put him on his back and unscrew the hook, then Crabbs, as he was called, was quite harmless. Once the man came

to me in great indignation. Bill Bruce had assaulted him, and his evidence was supported by the wife, who stated that while getting their breakfast Bruce had come in, unscrewed the hook in spite of all remonstrance, and had carried it off. I called on the assailant. Natty was there, but no Bill. He admitted that his friend had come in with Crabbs's 'other arm,' but he swore that he had taken it out again with him. Each day the one-arm man came to complain, furious at the loss of his hook. About three days afterwards Bruce walked into his house, screwed the missing arm on again, and departed without a word of explanation. 'I had a job down the river, and I thought he might be getting up to some tricks,' said Bill, when I asked him about it, 'so I thought I had better unship it and take it from him.' There was something in that; but Bill was certainly one of the best-hearted men I ever came across, and this demonstrated his thoughtfulness of others' comfort.

I always found among the poorest people, even in the submerged class, the truest Christian charity. The way they will help each other in difficulty is truly marvellous. It doesn't matter what the sickness may be — diphtheria or typhus — there are any number who will volunteer their services to nurse the patient, and the neighbours will give of their poverty in order to provide little luxuries for the one who is suffering. I have known the greatest blackguards give up the drink and the public-house in order to sit up with a friend, and make him little presents.

Sometimes death snatches away the father and mother of a family, but the children rarely go to the workhouse. There is always this person who will take one, and someone else who will take another, and the family is provided for at once. Beneath all the sin and misery, vice and poverty, there are kind hearts, the like of which we do not find elsewhere, and I somehow think that many of these degraded men and women

will receive the Divine smile of welcome in our Father's House, for which many regular churchgoers will look, and look in vain.

THE END

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